Bringing Wealth to Meditation

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The Buddha once described a mind of goodwill, a mind of compassion, appreciation, equanimity, without limit, abundant, as a meditator’s wealth. This is what makes you the mind wealthy, the sense that you can generate goodwill, without limit. You can just keep generating it. Of course, it doesn’t cost you anything, but as you generate it, the mind itself becomes larger, the mind itself becomes more abundant and unlimited. This is why we have that chant every evening before we meditate, spreading goodwill to all beings, compassion for all beings, appreciation, equanimity for all beings. Of course, simply repeating the chant doesn’t make the mind abundant, but at least it puts that seed in the mind. If you sit here meditating, feeling that you’re lacking, you don’t have enough of this, you don’t have enough peace, you don’t have enough concentration, you don’t have enough mindfulness, or there’s a sense of not enough, there’s a sense of discontent, you can step back for a minute and ask yourself, “Are you coming to the meditation as a poor person, or as a rich person?” You have a sense of poverty, a sense of lack in the mind. Stop and generate thoughts of goodwill. Try to do your best to keep that unwill unlimited. There’s nobody that you have ill will for. There’s nobody that you refuse to feel compassion for, and so on down the line. Develop those thoughts until they really take on reality. Attitudes like this can be developed. It may seem artificial in the beginning, but that’s simply a sign that you’ve got to work harder at it. When you come to the meditation with that sense of abundance, it’s a lot easier to be observant, to be judicious in what you do. We were talking this afternoon about gaining a sense of ease, a sense of well-being in the meditation, and grabbing at it, and, of course, destroying it. That’s because you come to the meditation with a sense of poverty, a sense of lack. This isn’t good, that isn’t good. You feel that you yourself aren’t any good. You’re lacking this, you’re lacking that, and you get a little bit coming your way, and you just grab at it. That, of course, destroys it. Look at people out in the world. How do poor people approach their jobs? You’ll find a lot of people, especially in the Third World, who get a job, gain some money, and then just take off and squander all their funds. They’ve finally got something, finally got some money in their pockets, and they want to spend it right away. As a result, they never get rich. It’s that sense of impatience. You’ve got to have it now. You’ve got to have gratification now. That’s poverty. That’s what keeps you poor, if you give into it. If you come to the meditation with a sense of wealth, with a sense of abundance, which you can develop through thoughts of goodwill, it’s a lot easier to be patient. The mind finally settles down a little bit. There’s a sense of ease. Instead of grabbing at it, you watch it. You look instead. Instead of grabbing at the results of your actions, you keep working away. It’s like the person who gains some money and instead of stopping work, goes off and squanders money, stays working. That’s the kind of worker who can keep a job. The people who get a little money and squander it, take time off, and then when they run out of money, come back to the boss and win another job again. It’s very unlikely that the boss is going to give them a job. It’s the same in the meditation. You just keep at it. Keep at it. Keep at it. The results get a little bit good. You don’t grab at them, but you just keep at the causes. You have enough patience. You have that sense of well-being that you’ve tried to develop in the mind beforehand. When a sense of ease begins to come, you don’t squeeze it. You don’t grab at it. You don’t destroy it. You’re content to watch it grow. As a result, it does get a chance to grow. So the sense of wealth in the mind doesn’t mean that you don’t want things to go well in the meditation. It’s just that you’re willing to have the patience. You’re not so hungry that you destroy the good things that come in the meditation. So if you find yourself suffering from this sense of not enough, spend time spreading thoughts of goodwill, because that is your wealth as a meditator. It costs nothing, and yet it can create a sense of abundance, a sense of openness, a sense of fullness in the mind. That puts the mind in the proper frame for meditating, the proper frame for focusing on the breath. It’s the same reason why the Buddha has us observe the precepts and has us practice generosity as part of the practice. The generosity in particular teaches us that many times we could hold on to something for fear of, “I won’t have enough next month,” or, “I won’t have enough next year,” or, “I won’t have enough next week. I’d better hold on to this right now.” But when you remind yourself of the virtue of generosity, as the Buddha said, if you really understood the results that would come from generosity, you wouldn’t take a meal without first sharing something with somebody. He said even if it was your last morsel of food, you’d still want to share. Sharing the rewards that come from generosity. When you think in these terms, it’s a lot easier to be sharing, and you have a greater sense of wealth. I remember how struck I was when I was in Thailand going out for alms and going past this little tiny grass shack. There was a young married couple just getting started. All they had was this one-room grass shack. Many times the wife would come running out with a little piece of sausage or a little piece of dried fish. She just wanted something, something to share. From the outside, of course, they looked very poor, but the fact that they always had something to share was a sign of wealth, wealth of the mind. When you learn to develop that attitude towards material things, then it’s a lot easier to translate that feeling into the meditation. The precepts give you a sense of wealth. They’re a gift, as the Buddha says, a gift you give to all beings. As you reflect on your precepts, you realize that if you hold to them without exception, as he says, you’re giving unlimited peace, unlimited security, unlimited freedom from animosity to all living beings, and you yourself get a share in that limitlessness. There’s a current of generosity that underlies the precepts that you’re willing to forego the things that you could do and could say to get what you want right away, because you want to make sure the process is harmless. The Buddha doesn’t say that you shouldn’t work to gain wealth or that you shouldn’t speak at all or enjoy yourself at all in life, but he’s saying that you should look at the process and make sure that the way you go about your life is harmless. There’s a generosity of spirit that underlies the practice. It also develops patience. Things you could get quickly by lying, you don’t want. You’re willing to take time. You tell the truth, even though it may take longer to get the results that you want. You’re willing to be patient. That patience, that spirit of generosity, that’s what it means to be wealthy in terms of the mind. So when the time comes to meditate, there already is a sense of well-being. There is a sense of contentment in the mind, a sense that you already have an abundance of spirit, an abundance of goodwill, compassion, appreciation, down the line. That way, as things happen in the meditation, good things happen in the meditation. You don’t destroy them. You allow them to grow. Otherwise, you’re like the woman I mentioned this afternoon. She was a woman who came to meditate sometimes in Breong. It’s not that her family was poor. In fact, they were one of the wealthier families in the area. But there’s something about the family that always made me feel uncomfortable. There was a strong sense of greed. No matter how wealthy they were, it was never enough. They always wanted more. One day she was sitting and meditating, and she had this vision of this golden tray coming floating towards her. So she actually reached out and tried to grab it. Of course, that destroyed her concentration. Not only that, she did that in front of a lot of other people. She had a lot of trouble explaining what she’d done. So many times we grab in our meditation, and we don’t grab with our arms. But we do grab it with a little sense of peace, with a little sense of well-being, with a little sense of concentration. And in the grabbing, we destroy it. It’s not that you shouldn’t want these things. It’s not the wanting that’s going to harm them. It’s the impatience, the sense of hunger, the sense of lack that destroys them. So you try to develop this sense of well-being. Another way of developing it is reflecting on your good fortune. You’ve met with the Dharma. You have a chance to practice. You live during a period when the Buddhist teachings are still around. There are very few people in the world who have this opportunity. You’ve got it. So already you’ve got good fortune right there. I notice that in some of Ajahn Mun’s talks he has to keep reminding his listeners, many of whom were sons of peasants in Thailand, that they already had wealth, that they already had good fortune. Of course, if you look at their position in society, you’re very conscious of how much they didn’t have. But we can look back at them now. They had the opportunity to be with Ajahn Mun. They had an opportunity to practice in a country where people could go out and practice, and the whole society would support them. Which I think is a very good thing. Of course, to them it was invisible because it was so pervasive. We have a lot of our own good fortune that’s invisible to us because it’s so pervasive. There are so many things we learn to take for granted. We’ll stop and think for a while. As I say, count your blessings, count your good fortune. So you develop this sense of contentment, this sense of inner wealth, that enables you to practice with patience. When you have patience, the skill of the meditation becomes more precise. With patience comes precision, comes a steadiness of mind. It makes it that much easier for you to settle down and get the results that you want for giving them a chance to grow.

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