

Life's Highest Blessings – A Commentary

The Buddha was once asked what constituted the highest blessings in life. His answer provides a checklist of what is most valuable in this life.

1. *To not associate with fools.*
This is those who drag one down with their foolishness; also includes drunkards, layabouts, etc.
2. *To associate with the wise.*
This refers to those who encourage one to grow spiritually. The Buddha emphasized the importance of good companionship in many ways. When Ananda remarked that good friends were half of the holy life, the Buddha replied, "Say not so! Good friends are the whole of the holy life!"
3. *To pay respects where they are due – reverencing those worthy of respect.*
This includes making *puja* to the Triple Jewel, as well as honouring one's teachers and elders. To have this opportunity is a blessing not to be missed!
4. *To reside in a suitable location.*
This is a place congenial to life, peaceful, and with such a society and economy that one can live free from want and fear.
5. *To have previously done meritorious deeds – having made merit in the past.*
Thus, one can enjoy the fruit now. But don't be a person who just lives off their capital! Invest in yourself by making more good merit now.
6. *To be heading in the right direction – having one's mind properly directed.*
If one is advancing spiritually, growing in wisdom and compassion, then one is surely blessed.
7. *To have much learning – including some profound learning.*
This is being well educated in the broadest sense; a well-rounded individual. In particular, to have knowledge of the Dhamma is to possess a jewel beyond price.
8. *To be skilled and knowledgeable – having proficiency in one's work.*
Every useful skill one possesses, crafts, trades, or special knowledge can be of some use in improving life for oneself and others.
9. *To be restrained by a moral code – having well-learned moral discipline.*
A sound morality is the basis of peace and happiness.

10. *To have beautiful speech – gracious and kindly speech.*
This is truthful, timely, and pleasant speech, connected with meaning. It is speech that others are delighted with and improved by hearing.
11. *To be a support for one's parents.*
The opportunity to repay the enormous debt one owes to one's mother and father should be seen as a blessing and not as a burden.
12. *To cherish one's wife and children.*
This is to have a happy family life.
13. *To make one's livelihood without difficulty – that is, business pursuits that are peaceful and free from conflicts.*
This is to have a wholesome occupation that one does well at and enjoys.
14. *To make gifts – to engage in acts of giving.*
Giving is a source of joy for both the giver and receiver. Be one blessed with a generous spirit.
15. *To live in accord with the Dhamma – that is, one's conduct is according to the Dhamma.*
To have heard the holy Dhamma in this life, and to have the capacity and opportunity to practice it, is a rare and wonderful privilege.
16. *To help one's relatives.*
This means to have a functioning extended family, either in the traditional sense or a community of friends and colleagues.
17. *To let one's actions be blameless.*
This means living one's life in an irreproachable way – where there is nothing to hide, nothing to fear, or nothing to regret.
18. *To shun evil.*
This is to reject, turn away from, or spurn any evil.
19. *To abstain from evil.*
This is having the inclination of mind that instinctively recoils from evil as if from a red hot iron ball.
20. *To refrain from intoxicants.*
This is not to need those substances which dull our precious human consciousness.

21. *To not be heedless of the Dhamma – but diligent in practicing what is the Dhamma.*
This includes being mindful and compassionate; going through life with eyes and heart open. Giving attention to details!
22. *To be respectful – to have reverence.*
Respect for the conventions is to make the life into a beautiful dance. Respect for the Buddha nature of all beings is the root of refined manners.
23. *To be humble – having humility.*
Pride goes before a fall, but the meek shall inherit the earth.
24. *To be content – having contentment.*
Contentment with little is the magical wish-fulfilling gem! It is also a healthy attitude for our planet right now.
25. *To have gratitude – an attitude of gratefulness.*
The Buddha said that gratitude is rare to find in this world. One must always remember that one never would have gotten this far without a lot of help!
26. *To hear the Dhamma at the right time – the timely hearing of the Dhamma.*
Anyone who has experienced a word of teaching that touched the heart at just the right moment knows what a precious gift this can be.
27. *To have patience.*
Patience is a virtue, and also a blessing. One can think of how much suffering comes from impatience.
28. *To be easy to admonish – having meekness when corrected.*
Make yourself amenable to teaching and those with something to teach will be ready to help you.
29. *To see or meet monks.*
The robed figure of the recluse is an archetypal call to consciousness. The monk, together with the dead man, the sick man, and the old man, are called the four divine messengers.
30. *To discuss the Dhamma at a suitable or proper time.*
Speaking of the holy Dhamma is the noblest use of the human power of speech. To be blessed with time and companions with which to speak of things tending to liberation is amazing grace indeed.

31. *To practice austerities – that is, energetic self-restraint.*

In the Buddhist context, this includes the practising of meditation – having a daily practice and regular retreats.

32. *To lead a holy and chaste life.*

This includes living devoted to the Eightfold Path and the seeking of liberation.

(The blessings which follow are supramundane.)

33. *To have insight into the Noble Truths.*

This includes the arising of the Dhamma eye. It refers to a level of direct penetration well beyond the intellectual.

34. *To experience the realization of Nibbana.*

This is going through the gateless gate it is the treasure beyond any price in heaven and earth.

(The blessings which follow are the fruits of the supramundane.)

35. *To have a mind unshaken by the ups and downs of life – that is, a mind unshaken by contact with the world.*

This refers to being in the world, but not of it.

36. *To have freedom from sorrow – that is, sorrowlessness.*

This is to live beyond the realms of suffering.

37. *To have freedom from the defilements of passion – that is, the quality of stainlessness.*

This is to experience the end of the obscuring defilements.

38. *To have perfect security.*

To have perfect security so that once found it cannot be lost.

These are the highest blessings!

Having accomplished this

one is always unconquered,

one goes everywhere in peace.

These are the blessings supreme!

Based on the Mangala Sutta from the Sutta Nipata.

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