

What Is Right Livelihood?

In maintaining ourselves and supporting our families, expending our wealth for the various articles we use or consume, we must use our earnings — coming from our Right Actions — in ways that are in keeping with moral principles. Only then will they provide safety and security, fostering the freedom and peace in our life that will help lead to inner calm. For example, there are four ways of using our wealth rightly so as to foster our own livelihood and that of others, providing happiness for all:

1. *Charity*: expending our wealth so as to be of use to the poor, sick, needy, or helpless who merit the help of people who have wealth, both inner and outer, so that they may live in ease and comfort.
2. *Support*: expending what wealth we can afford to provide for the ease and comfort of our family and close friends.
3. *Aid*: expending our wealth or our energies for the sake of the common good — for example, by helping local government either actively or passively. "Actively" means donating a sum of money to a local branch of the government, such as setting up a fund to foster any of its various activities. "Passively" means being willing to pay our taxes for the sake of the nation, not trying to be evasive or uncooperative. Our wealth will then benefit both ourselves and others.
4. *Offerings (danapuja)*: This means making gifts of the four necessities of life to support Buddhism. This is a way of paying homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha that will serve the purposes of the religion. At the same time, it's a way of earning inner wealth, termed "*ariyadhana*." A person observing the principles of Right Livelihood who does this will reap benefits both in this life and in the next.

The wealth we have rightfully earned, though, if we don't have a sense of how to use it properly, can cause us harm both in this life and in lives to come. Thus, in expending our wealth in the area of charity, we should do so honestly. In the area of support, we should use forethought and care. The same holds true in the areas of aid and offerings. Before making expenditures, we should consider the circumstances carefully, to see whether or not they're appropriate. If they aren't, then we shouldn't

provide assistance. Otherwise, our wealth may work to our harm. If we provide help to people who don't deserve it — for instance, giving assistance to extortioners — the returns may be detrimental to our own situation. The same holds true in making offerings to the religion. If a monk has no respect for the monastic discipline, doesn't observe the principles of morality, neglects his proper duties — the threefold training — and instead behaves in ways that are deluded, misguided, and deceitful, then whoever makes offerings to such a monk will suffer for it in the end, as in the saying,

Make friends with fools and they'll lead you astray;
Make friends with the wise and they'll show you the way.
Make friends with the evil and you'll end up threadbare,
And the fruit of your evil is: No one will care.

In short, there are two sides to Right Livelihood:

First, we should have a sense of how to use our wealth so as to maintain ourselves in line with our station in life, being neither too miserly nor too extravagant.

Second, we should give help to other people, as we are able, so as to provide them with comfort and well-being.

Source: Adapted from "The Path to Peace and Freedom for the Mind", by Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo, translated from the Thai by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight (Legacy Edition)*, 1 December 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/thai/lee/pathtopeace.html>