

Realizing True Wealth by Americ Azevedo

We are born with true wealth, but constantly forget to realize the wealth we already have. Failing to acknowledge our true wealth we keep grasping for more, like hungry ghosts who are never satisfied while constantly eating! Thus, we go about despoiling the earth, corrupting relationships, and twisting societies into grotesque forms that promote needless suffering for ourselves, others, and the earth-at-large. Realizing true wealth leads to personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal fulfillment. Furthermore, the long term survival of life on earth depends upon true wealth realization.

We need deep psychological and spiritual healing of individuals, groups, communities, nations and the earth at large. The bedrock of this healing is a return to this present moment, not in a selfish, narrow way, but in a way that includes the totality of what is here-there as well as past-present-future. It is nothing less than the ancient ideal of enlightenment of all sentient beings.

The Paradox of Wealth

We may have money but little time. We may have time but no money. We may have love but neither time nor money. Coming to a point of balance between these factors is mastery of the art of living which is true wealth.

It's been said, "He who dies with the most toys, wins!" This is both true and not-true. Some say, "money does not matter" -- but quietly and privately we fear poverty. Fear of homelessness, hunger, and a drop in social status drives many to insane focus on money at any cost. If you are poor with a positive state of mind, you may still suffer a sense of emotion degradation just from the social stigma of poverty. Such fears are well founded in societies that fail to attain true wealth, since the members of those societies know they can and do fall into poverty. A world based on fear cannot be wealthy in any real sense.

Our possessions can own us. Attach ourselves to our possessions and we immediately lose our sense of true wealth. The very desire for possessions not yet owned breeds greed and lust. We suffer endless rounds of grasping for the goods that will make us "happy and full". We get "more", but immediately need to get "more" again. There is no end in sight.

“Business as usual” means a life filled with urgency, running to keep up, and without time. “Oh! If only I had more money, I would do the work I love.” Or, “If I had that big new house on the hill, people would respect and love me. My wife would stay with me.” Such conceptions of wealth are very childish.

Many of the “richest” people in the world are always “hungry”. Much shopping is for useless trinkets which act as displacements for lack of meaning and love in life. Many a parent, for example, who has no time for talking with their children, will just buy toys. Most people identify with the stuff that they own as an extension of their personal ego. Consider automobiles and houses which function as symbols of wealth, but are also destructive to the natural capital of nature.

True wealth goes beyond the concerns of the skin encapsulated ego. True wealth includes the social, political, and transpersonal levels. What about a friend or relative who needs help? What about broader environmental concerns? True wealth goes beyond the individual, and even national, egos. What you spend your money on, changes, impacts society. Buy an SUV because you like personal leg room, but consume the air and warm the environment for everyone else as well as yourself.

Time, Love, and Money

An old man asked me, “With what do you buy your money?”

I said, “With your life.”

He said, “Right! I wish I had known that when I was young. I spent my life working for money instead of living.”

Time, love and money are the three legs of truth wealth’s stool. The time allotted to your life is utterly fundamental; a finite constantly depleting resource. Have you loved enough? Have you made money, invested money, and spent money in a way that sustains life on this earth for seven generations to come? Most don’t think we have time for these questions. We can be occupied working for money that we buy cars, drive to places, buy food from thousands of miles away, thus depleting earth’s natural capital without noticing it.

Many people will say that they are making good money, but have no sense of free time. They hope that someday in the future they will have time for the things they really enjoy like family and nature. Often that day never comes. I once worked at the headquarters of

Standard Oil. My life had become the company. When I went home, my mind was preoccupied with Standard Oil. One day I awoke to realize that I worked in an environment that was loveless. I had money, but love and time were in short supply.

What is money? It's a symbol for value, it is information; it is abstract. Humans are driven by symbols to go to war and fight for abstract causes. Money, being utterly abstract, is often valued more for itself than for what it actually buys – it is the ultimate “field of dreams”. Individuals and societies measure self-worth by financial net-worth, but this devalues the deeper qualities of awareness and soul that are the true source of all value.

Walking by a beautiful garden filled with iris flowers, someone might think: “I don't own it, how unfortunate!” So they miss the simple joy of the experience. You don't need to own things in order to enjoy them. To really “have” something we must be present to it. Taking time to appreciate the existence of an object, a friend, or a place is really having that object before us.

Wealth is transpersonal because it is “beyond the personal”. Everything that we do to accumulate wealth depends on past human efforts; as well as the Earth, the solar system, and the cosmos at large. You are not your own source of supply. Companies create private wealth by extracting resources from nature as if nature is “free” and unlimited. Water, for example, was always free. Industrial pollution turns water into another commodity with price barriers for the poor and helpless. This situation creates transpersonal poverty.

There can be a wealth of time. Societies can make time for living, for singing, for family, for just sitting and watching. This wealth is greater than the focus on consuming goods and working to pump up the “gross domestic product”.

A man can become homeless and starve to death in a big city filled with apartments, hotels, and food. It is not just lack of money that brings us to the homeless state. Depression, lack of faith in life, lack of friends, and lack of family ties can bring one to this place. Call it lack of love.

We cannot be truly wealthy in such societies with extremes of poverty and riches. The expansive homes of the few wealthy are beautiful, but the society is really poor and ugly. So many become restless and debased in such a society. I cannot relax in a mansion without security systems and insensitivity to the disparity around me. Just like the Buddhists who say they cannot become enlightened until everyone is enlightened, you and I cannot be truly wealthy until all are “wealthy”. Clearly, a new meaning of wealth needs to emerge for the culture at large.

Balanced Wealth Portfolio

An investor will diversify her assets into different categories of assets so as to balance out risk with the changing tides of market fortunes. The seeker of true wealth balances the assets of time, love and money across the dimensions of personal, interpersonal and transpersonal – thus optimizing abundant life for themselves, neighbors, future generations, and Earth.

A balanced wealth portfolio can be attained by disciplining the ego and personal pride. This spiritual practice has ramifications for self, society, and life on earth. Portfolios are lists of assets by categories. We could begin by playing with lists of “assets”. One simple list of categories for grouping our assets would look like this:

1. Personal-money
2. Personal-time
3. Personal-love
4. Interpersonal-money
5. Interpersonal-time
6. Interpersonal-love
7. Transpersonal-money
8. Transpersonal-time
9. Transpersonal-love

These categories are not absolute; they are starting points to help us on the road to true wealth realization. Make up your own categories and lists. Begin from where you are, and expand to include larger dimensions of wealth.

True Wealth Realization Practice

Wealth is usually defined by external measures: affluence, millionaire money levels, ownership and control of companies, and influence over people. Look deeper; and, there is the feeling of being wealthy or poor more or less independent of external wealth measures. Work with that feeling so as to become more independent of the strictly personal illusions of money-wealth and poverty.

Remember who you really are. This means giving yourself the time to contact your own

ultimate wealth: the soul. Your own soul is your own ultimate wealth. As you begin to be wealthy in yourself, you will be able to extend your sense of wealth to include others and reality at large. Every soul is the same soul - only covered by different personality, history and circumstances. I could have been any one of the other people that I see everyday.

To awaken to this very moment is truth wealth. This moment is in truth all we really have and own. Everything else is just on loan; we must give it all back in the end.