

Life's three highest priorities

by Piya Tan

On this last day of the year, I want to reflect on my life's priorities. Fortunately, there is an instructive discourse, the Adhigateyya Sutta (A 3.40), that helps me put my life in proper perspective.

The Adhigateyya Sutta speaks of three things we should give the highest priority to. These three are (1) the self, (2) others (the world), and (3) true happiness (the Dharma). You might like to join me in this reflection.

The self-priority

When I have desire or lust, it is almost always for an object outside of myself. What is it here that attracts me? Am I just attracted to a certain part of this person or object? Will I really be happy if I were to really get what I desire? What is it I really want in life?

When I am angry or hateful, what is it that I am really angry about? Or, is it just an excuse to show ill will towards something that I dislike in myself. How does my body feel when I am angry (raised blood pressure, faster heart-rate, negative thoughts): all these are not good for me. Anger is a harmful poison: let go of it, let go of it.

What is it that I fear? What am I confused about? Let me put it down into clear words, and examine it closely. Why am I fearful? What am I confused about? (Just ask, your mind will answer it.) Let me think of something happy.

If I value myself, let me be guided by the precepts:

- (1) Let me respect life, avoid violence; let me show lovingkindness to everyone around me.
- (2) Let me not take what is not mine; let me be generous whenever I can.
- (3) Let me respect those I like or love, and understand, even forgive them.
- (4) Let me speak the truth that is helpful and healing.
- (5) Let me keep my mind free from any kind of addictive behaviour.

All this I do because I am the most important person to me. Because I am the only person who can really change me for the better.

Other-priority

There many people out there in the world. Many of them are wiser than I am: they will know if I were to commit any evil. They will censure and shun me. If not, the law will catch up with me.

There are those I think who behave stupidly or rudely. They are not doing those stupid or rude things just because of me. It is their nature and the conditions they live in. But they too can change.

Just as I know that others are doing wrong things, so others too will know if I am doing any evil. Let me not do anything that others will censure me.

Dharma-priority

I like the Buddhist way of life. As such, I will put every effort to be mindful in my daily life.

There are so many great and wonderful teachings I have yet to know. But I only need to know just a few useful teachings that will guide me and show me true happiness.

Let me not ask what Buddhism can do for me. For, I am Buddhism, in what I do, say and think. The Dharma is what I am, what I can be: awakened.

I will not live forever. So let me live this life preciously.

Let me not ask for love, but let me love so that I am loved.

Let me give and forgive so that the hearts of others are warmed.

Let me hold back harsh words; they hurt both ways.

Let me sincerely and timely praise others, for it empowers both sides.

Whenever I meet someone, let me say in my mind, "May you be well and happy!" He will see the radiance in my face.

Let me regularly set time aside for knowing the Dharma. It adds great value to what I rightly am and what I rightly have. Let me spend daily moments in stillness. This is the way to true happiness.

To download Adhipateyya Sutta, go to

<http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com/an.guttaranikaaya> then and click A 3.40.

A very Happy Double New Year! The Ox reminds us that industry brings us success and happiness.