

Being Good rather than Being Good At

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

It seems as though obituaries have changed. Where once they would talk of a person's qualities with examples, they now only mention what the person 'did'. Achievements rate the person rather than character. The consequence is that we come to believe that those who have been successful in the world – fame, riches and power – are necessarily good people. Yet we know today's culture favours the bully, the callous entrepreneur, the ones who can muscle their way to the top. Whether we like it or not, it will affect the way we think about ourselves. If we have to judge ourselves by our achievements, the work we do, our status, then I should think very few of us are satisfied. We are into the game of comparison. This leads to great effort to 'prove oneself'. This, in turn, leads to envy and jealousy of others. In all, we may end up being successful in the eyes of the world, but our hearts will be in turmoil. If our hearts are polluted with all the negativity that comes from aggressive competitiveness, keeping up with the Jones' and so on, this cannot be conducive to happiness, to an inner sense of worthiness. We never feel ourselves to be quite good enough. In the Discourse on Blessings, the Mangala Sutta, as well as such social qualities such as being 'well educated and skilled, a highly trained discipline', the Buddha lists such qualities as: generosity, ethical conduct, blameless actions, reverence, humility, contentment, gratitude, patience, gentleness self-discipline ... these are the Highest Blessing. Whose mind does not flutter by contact with worldly contingencies, theirs is sorrowless, stainless, and secure. It's not that what we do doesn't matter. Far from it. What we do is an expression of our attitudes and the intentions that arise out of them. However, if we put the accent on our attitude and intention, making sure they are wholesome, and then do the deed, that deed will enhance our feeling of goodness. And the deed, no matter how well done, will not carry negative undertones. If a person is skilful in doing something, and yet they carry about with them a negative attitude, they may very well be chosen to do the jobs, but they won't make many friends. So if we want to feel good about ourselves - and want people to feel good about us – all we need do is get the attitude right. Next time you are doing something whether for yourself, for a friend or at work, just stop before you do and ask yourself, 'What is the underlying attitude that is accompanying the work?' If it's negative, put it to the side. Park it. And put a wholesome attitude into your heart. If it feels false, that's ok. It can take a while for the emotional heart to catch up. Then do the work. Hum the old song - 'T'ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it. (Ella Fitzgerald) Right Attitude leads to Right intention, leads to Right Action, leads to a feeling of goodness within which is also a form of happiness.

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