

What Values Govern Our Lives?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

What values do we have and how do we rate them in importance? How much of our lives is motivated by success in other people's eyes? If this is where most of our energy goes, it will be given to gaining such totems of success as power, riches and fame. When the self is involved in self-aggrandisement, only caring for or overly caring for one's social image, then we are in conflict with the world, for our aim is to accumulate whether it's power, riches or kudos. This puts us into areas where others also seek the same. Conflict, whatever intensity, brings a hardness to the heart for it doesn't care for the rival. This loss of empathy, when generalised, leads to uncaring attitudes towards such areas as human rights – 'Just as I have to fight my gains, so should you!'; and nature, 'Why should I stop plundering the earth until everyone else stops?'. Furthermore, in fighting for what we want in order to look good, we have to learn the tricks of winning such as manipulation, deceit, and making sure we know how to take advantage of hierarchy. And it puts us into a judgemental position, constantly rating others, measuring ourselves against others, leading to pride, envy, jealousy and outright hatred. However, the problem does not lie in power, riches, fame or any other signal of celebrity success. If you want to change the world for the better, you need to have either influence or power. If you happen to have a good commercial idea or a special international skill, money flows towards you. We may have some talent which lots of people want to enjoy. We would be the poorer society without politicians (beware the cynic!), entrepreneurs and artists. The problem as always is how we relate to this. How do we gain our self-worth without these negative consequences? The answer is to make sure we are coming from the right place: the right understanding and the right attitude. Luckily, there is an easy way to recognise that we are acting out of wrong understanding and attitude. It's when we become aware of our negative and conceited thoughts and any other unwholesome reactions. It's when we don't 'feel appreciated', 'praised enough', 'valued'. When people don't 'show the respect owed to us' and so on. This is why the Buddha asks us to reflect wisely. For the best spiritual results we need to imbue what we do with such virtues as generosity, service, respect for others, appreciation of others' work, integrity, loyalty – the list goes on.

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