

Piya Tan's 2022 New Year Message

2022: Growth and Possibilities

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Surely many of us older folks recall how excitedly we waited for and welcome the year 2000. There was also some superstitious scare that there will be the “Millennium Bug” that will plague havoc on the world’s computer system, but nothing of the sort happened. Now 20 years, 2 decades, have passed: it is like the year 2000 was only yesterday.

When 2020 ended, we hope for a new year free from COVID-19 (the Coronavirus pandemic that started in December 2019). But this time, it got only worse, and now we are getting into the 3rd year of the global pandemic. Some 5.5 million people have died from it world-wide, and more will.

Keeping the body safe

For our own personal safety, and that of others, the authorities keep reminding us to wear masks in public and when in groups, and to practise “social distancing.” Many companies and institutions had their employees work from home. Even schools were often suspended and students were taught online.

Informed Buddhists, especially those know the suttas, see all this as familiarly echoing the Buddha’s warning against “suffering” or face its consequences.

“Heedfulness is the path to the deathless.

Heedlessness is the path to death.

The heedful do not die. [They attain nirvana.]

The heedless are as if already dead. (Dhammapada 21)

Living safely

The mask-wearing (covering our nose and mouth) is symbolic of neither taking in “bad air” nor breathing out bad air that may infect others. This “bad air” also refers to the kind of language we use (whether we arouse in others negative emotions or not), and the kind of words we use (whether they are beneficial or not). Simply, this hints as Right Speech.

Then, the Buddha teaches us “social distancing” millennia before we knew about COVID. The spaces in our lives with others not only keeps us safe, but also allow others the freedom they need, the space to grow healthily in. It is represented in the 3rd precept, which is not only against sexual misconduct, but upholds the value of RESPECT for others in their person and personality.

This social distance not only gives us a full view of others, but allows us to communicate with others as a group, community and sangha. We put our palms together and bow to others to remind them that they have the potential for good and joy. Social distancing as a wholesome practice is as old as Buddhism itself.

Living apart yet a part of you

The Covid pandemic fortunately did not impact our lives as full-time Dhamma workers since we are used to teaching the Dhamma and distancing ourselves from toxic and negative people, and avoiding bad air. We are used to “living apart” from others, especially those who do not love the Buddha Dhamma. Living this way, with our full-time Dhamma work, we are always “a part” of your lives.

We are always available to you, at the click of the computer mouse when you access our social media for sutta translations and Dhamma teachings. In fact, the pandemic has spurred us to learn how to communicate safely through online Dhamma classes, such as via Zoom. We are now communicating with the whole world, with anyone anywhere on earth who wants to learn the suttas.

2 decades of full-time work

The year 2020 (February) marks the 2nd decade of our full-time Dhamma work, especially the Sutta Discovery (SD) work. I started working on the suttas, translating them, writing modern commentaries on them, and teaching them regularly for 20 years now. We are right now working on SD 60.

However, we often have double, triple, even a quadruple volume-set, which means that in real numbers, we have over 80 SD volumes (each volume is about 200 A4 pages). This can only happen when we work on an almost daily basis. To be able to do this, we must need more than mere human food; we must be sustained by JOY in the Dhamma. This is a most joyful profession, which here means we profess the Buddha Dhamma: the 3 jewels are our refuges.

In simple terms, taking REFUGE means, to use a contemporary imagery, to live as if there is a pandemic on, and to live safely, sheltered by what is good and joyful for us all. Our lives and work benefit numerous others worldwide, even beyond this generation through the transmission of the Sutta Discovery translations, essays and other Dhamma-spirited works. These works contain the seeds and catalyst for wholesome change which the wise of posterity will sow and harvest so that we live the Dhamma in our own homes and community. This is the vision of our Dhamma work.

Daily vision

The Dhamma work we are doing is full-time, lasting for the rest of our lives; indeed, must continue even after that. Often, in a single sitting, we complete only a bit of beautiful Dhamma work and save it in our SD archives. This gives us a powerful purpose to rest well, stay well, be joyful (the fuel for our work).

We find sleep and rest meaningful; we wake up even more meaningfully, looking forward to complete the work of beauty, truth and love that awaits us. Then, there are breaks for my senior yoga; we (Ratna and I) go for walks in our neighbourhood, in the nearby Jurong Lake

Gardens. This is one of the most beautiful parts of the country. We feel blessed, and want you to feel blessed, too.

Gratefulness

You have made all this possible: that we live and work as full-time Dhamma workers, and live enviably Dhamma-spirited lives of meaning, purpose, truth and beauty. You have supported our work with your Dhamma stewardship. You are sharing our joys in reading and weeding our works as proof-readers. We call this “THE PROOF OF THE DHAMMA” ministry.

We have so much to thank for in this life of refuge in the 3 jewels. In all these amazing blessings, we must remember our one and only true teacher, the Buddha; we should practise and uphold only his true teaching, the Buddha Dhamma; we should be inspired by only the noble sangha, the great arhats and those on the path, to which we, too, aspire, so that in this life itself, we will rise from the shadows of subhuman lives to the light of the path of awakening.

May 2022 be a year of personal growth and spiritual possibilities for you and your loved ones, and also in our Dhamma work for more decades to come. With metta.

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