This is our year

Reflections for 2025

When we reach our senior years (I'm 75), you may notice that time seems to be moving faster. For me, Friday seems to come tomorrow every week. On the 1st Friday I have to prepare a sutta for sutta class on the following Friday. It's a gratifying feeling though since I have been studying and teaching suttas since 2001. So it's like meeting old friends, enjoying past good karma and creating new ones.

The best thing I love about the Friday (Zoom) sutta class is when it ends; another warm session with friends in global fellowship. Not many people can speak of having a friendly meet-up every fortnight globally over something timeless! I'm sure most, if not all, would feel a sense of accomplishment when the class ends. Sadhu!

CONSTANT CLASS

We started the regular Zoom sutta classes in 2020, and it has been going on since. One really great thing about the Zoom sutta sessions is that we can see our friends' faces live in real-time (give or take a few microseconds for light to travel). For the older students, I recall our younger days. I feel very joyful to see them still loving the suttas after all these decades (more than 40 years).

As I age, I notice most people do not really change the way they were as children. They just become more sophisticated versions of those children! If they were quarrelsome, they now find more subtle ways of hurting others. If they were friendly, they will remain warm and real like earth and sky. Although we are apart living our own lives, we are always and naturally a spacious part of each other. We stand firmly on the earth that is Dharma, we become more open like the sky that is Dharma.

LISTENING

On this 1st day of the new year, I think of young children, lustily and joyfully shouting and playing. There's so much to learn from watching how children communicate. As we age, we seem to communicate less but make more of social and emotional manoeuvres.

I think that as we age, one skill we must continue to develop is that of listening to others. We often think we have so many stories to share, but we keep repeating ourselves. Yet, listening can be repeated, the more the better! We can learn so much from talkative people, from what they are not saying.

BROTHER

As we age, we often find we have less relatives and friends to chat with. I find it so gratifying when I am able to chat with intelligent children (even the duller ones are usually good listeners). The great thing about children is that they tend to believe

whatever we adults tell them, if we say it creatively enough. But then wait till they grow up and we grow old; we are then reminded of our tall tales; the hearers are taller now.

My dear late brother Beng Tee (14 years my senior, 1935-2012) must have felt profoundly lonely in his senior years. He developed dementia and started talking to Japanese girls in a corner of the room. We simply need to engage with seniors: *our mind, use it or lose it*! My family is small which means we are often speaking with one another; even slapping one another on the hands with Taco Cat (amazing card game for seniors).

TALKING CAT

And yes, I just can't help chatting with Tikki, our calico tabby, highly intelligent and engaging who knows my daily routine well and meows at me for meals (my meal that is) and rest-time. She is amazingly engaging when I chat with her. Even though I do not understand Catanese very well, I think she understands me better. She just meows back right on cue. She has that gaze and pose that reminds us animals are yet to evolve into humans; that they go to heaven, too, you know. At least we know that in Buddhism.

I confess this will be a difficult year for us in Singapore where we breathe business and money; how easily we tire and suffocate. We just need to learn to chat with people, like with our family members and with neighbours. I think this is a great way to start the New Year: make friends right now, spread happiness forever.

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