AN 3.40 — AN 3:40 Governing Principles | Ādhipateyya Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

Governing Principles

Ādhipateyya Sutta (AN 3:40)

"There are these three governing principles. Which three? The self as a governing principle, the cosmos as a governing principle, and the Dhamma as a governing principle.

"And what is the self as a governing principle? There is the case where a monk, having gone to a wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, reflects on this: 'It is not for the sake of robes that I have gone forth from the home life into homelessness; it is not for the sake of almsfood, for the sake of lodgings, or for the sake of this or that state of (future) becoming that I have gone forth from the home life into homelessness. Simply

that I am beset by birth, aging, & death; by sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs; beset by stress, overcome with stress, (and I hope,) "Perhaps the end of this entire mass of suffering & stress might be known!" Now, if I were to seek the same sort of sensual pleasures that I abandoned in going forth from home into homelessness—or a worse sort—that would not be fitting for me.' So he reflects on this: 'My persistence will be aroused & not lax; my mindfulness established & not confused; my body calm & not aroused; my mind centered & unified.' Having made himself his governing principle, he abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is unblameworthy, and looks after himself in a pure way. This is called the self as a governing principle.

"And what is the cosmos as a governing principle? There is the case where a monk, having gone to a wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, reflects on this: 'It's not for the sake of robes that I have gone forth from the home life into homelessness; it's not for the sake of almsfood, for the sake of lodgings, or for the sake of this or that state of (future) becoming that I have gone forth from the home life into homelessness. Simply that I am beset by birth, aging, & death; by sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs; beset by stress, overcome with stress, (and I hope,) "Perhaps the end of this entire mass of suffering & stress might be known!" Now if I, having gone forth, were to think thoughts of sensuality, thoughts of ill will, or thoughts of harmfulness: Great is the community of this cosmos, and in the great community of this cosmos there are contemplatives & brahmans endowed with psychic power, clairvoyant, skilled (in reading) the minds of others. They can see even from afar. Even up close, they are invisible. With their awareness they know the minds of others. They would know this of me: "Look, my friends, at this clansman who—though he has in good faith gone forth from the home life into homelessness—remains overcome with evil, unskillful mental qualities." There are also devas endowed with psychic power, clairvoyant, skilled (in reading) the minds of others. They can see even from afar. Even up close, they are invisible. With their awareness they know the minds of others. They would know this of me: "Look, my friends, at this clansman who—though he has in good faith gone forth from the home life into homelessness—remains overcome with evil, unskillful mental qualities.'" So he reflects on this: 'My persistence will be aroused & not lax; my mindfulness established & not confused; my body calm & not aroused; my mind centered & unified.' Having made the cosmos his governing principle, he abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is unblameworthy, and looks after himself in a pure way. This is called the cosmos as a governing principle.

"And what is the Dhamma as a governing principle? There is the case where a monk, having gone to a wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, reflects on this: 'It's not for the sake of robes that I have gone forth from the home life into homelessness; it's not for the sake of almsfood, for the sake of lodgings, or for the sake of this or that state of (future) becoming that I have gone forth from the home life into homelessness. Simply that I am beset by birth, aging, & death; by sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs; beset by stress, overcome with stress, (and I hope,) "Perhaps the end of this entire mass of suffering & stress might be known!" Now, the Dhamma is well taught by the Blessed One, to be seen here & now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent,

to be experienced by the observant for themselves. There are companions in the holy life who dwell knowing & seeing it. If I—having gone forth in this well-taught Dhamma & Vinaya—were to remain lazy & heedless, that would not be fitting for me.' So he reflects on this: 'My persistence will be aroused & not lax; my mindfulness established & not confused; my body calm & not aroused; my mind centered & unified.' Having made the Dhamma his governing principle, he abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is unblameworthy, and looks after himself in a pure way. This is called the Dhamma as a governing principle.

"These are the three governing principles."

There is

in the cosmos

no

secret

place

for one

who has done

an

evil

deed.

Your own self knows, my good man,

whether you are true

or false.

You underestimate the fine witness

that is yourself,

you with evil

in yourself

that then you hide.

The devas & Tathāgatas see the fool

who goes about

off-pitch in the cosmos.

Thus you should go about

self-governed,

mindful;

governed by the cosmos,

masterful,

absorbed in jhāna;

governed by the Dhamma,

acting in line

with the Dhamma.

The sage who makes an effort

in truth

doesn't fall back.

Whoever through striving

—overpowering Māra,

conquering the Ender1—

touches the stopping of birth,

is

Such,2

a knower of the cosmos,

wise,

a sage

unfashioned

with regard to all things.

Notes

1. The Ender: an epithet for Māra, who as repeated mortality keeps putting an end to things.

2. Such (tādin): An adjective applied to the mind of one who has attained the goal. It indicates that the mind "is what it is"—indescribable but not subject to change or alteration.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 24; SN 51:15; AN 4:159; AN 4:245