Negativity

August 31, 2024

There’s a saying in Christian circles, that even the devil can quote scripture to his own purposes. And there’s a similar saying in Dhamma circles, which is that the defilements can quote the Dhamma for their purposes. There’s a saying in Christian circles, that even the devil can quote scripture to his own purposes. And there’s a similar saying in Dhamma circles, which is that the defilements can quote the Dhamma for their purposes. There’s a saying in Christian circles, that even the devil can quote scripture to his own purposes. And there’s a similar saying in Dhamma circles, which is that the defilements can quote the Dhamma for their purposes. There’s a saying in Christian circles, that even the devil can quote scripture to his own purposes. And there’s a similar saying in Christian circles, which is that the defilements can quote the Dhamma for their purposes. Especially bad when your inner voices are toxic, and they do everything they can to make you feel bad, make you feel guilty over things you’ve done in the past that were wrong. And they themselves sound like they’re on the right in making you feel miserable. And part of this is due to the fact that we do come from a culture in which guilt was said to be a spiritual virtue, a sense of your own guilt. But for the Buddha, it’s not a virtue at all. He talks about the proper way to deal with mistakes you’ve made. The first, of course, is to recognize that it was a mistake. But then to realize that getting tied up in the pots of guilt and remorse is not going to undo the mistake. It will actually weaken you. Because you need to make your mind strong so that you don’t repeat the mistake. He recommends two things. One is a healthy sense of shame. Now, shame may sound very similar to guilt, but it’s not. It’s actually an aspect of self-esteem. Basically, telling yourself that you’re telling yourself that you’ve aimed at a good goal, you’ve got goodness to you, but you’ve slipped. And that what you did was beneath you. Notice that it’s beneath you. That means that you should have some self-esteem. Basically, think about what normal people would say or think if they saw the mistake. And they would recognize it as a mistake. But remember, they’re compassionate. They care for your well-being. So they want you to know that it’s a mistake, but also that you have the potential within you to do better. And they want to encourage that potential. That leads to the second part, which is thoughts of goodwill, thoughts of compassion, thoughts of empathetic joy, thoughts of equanimity. In other words, the Brahmavaras. Once you’ve recognized a mistake, have some goodwill for yourself. Remind yourself that you are aiming at happiness. And any voices inside you that are not aiming at happiness are not Dhamma at all. As I said, they may sound like Dhamma because they can tell you what’s wrong and what you’ve done. But the Buddha pointed out mistakes not to punish people, but to just make them note, “Okay, this is a mistake. Something that shouldn’t be repeated.” And that’s as far as he would take it. His overriding purpose was to get people out of suffering. And so you tell yourself, “I’m here for the sake of true happiness.” And then extend thoughts of compassion and thoughts of goodwill to the people you’ve wronged, and then thoughts of goodwill to everybody. So the mistake you made to begin with was based on ill will. You tell yourself you have no reason to repeat it. It was based on other things like carelessness. That’s when you have compassion. Again, you tell yourself, “Human beings make mistakes. It’s normal. You’re not the only one who’s made a mistake.” If you beat yourself up over a mistake, there comes to be a voice inside that says, “I don’t care.” And then it goes back and forth between the sense of guilt and the sense of not caring. Neither of which are going to be helpful. If you really have compassion for yourself, you tell yourself, “Yeah, I recognize the mistake and that’s as far as I need to go.” With the discussion inside about that mistake. And then thoughts of equanimity. You remind yourself you’re not the only person in the world who has made mistakes. You think of other people everywhere. They’ve made mistakes too. So it’s part of being in samsara. And it’s interesting that the Buddha’s reflections on equanimity with regard to samsara also lead to a sense of samvega. This is what it’s like. As long as you stay in samsara, it’s going to be like this. There are going to be mistakes. Mistakes you make, mistakes other people make. And it should lead to a desire to get out. So the proper attitude with the Dhamma is always this. We’re here to get out. We’re here to develop. A sense of disenchantment with the world, a sense of dispassion. That’s what’s called practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. Because you’re trying to develop whatever attitudes are in line with that. And one of the attitudes, the Buddha said, is a sense of competence. In other words, you can do this. You can follow the path. Now whether it’s going to be quickly, quickly or slowly, that’s another matter. But the fact that you can do this is an attitude you want to keep developing over and over and over again. So anything that is in line with that, that you can do this, that’s a voice of the Dhamma. The voice that says you’re incapable of doing this, that’s not Dhamma. There are stories of we had chimes in Thailand dealing with very poor people up in the Northeast. They themselves came from poor families and they knew that if you want to make something of yourself, it takes effort. And part of that effort is competency. Yes, I can do this. Now they lived in a society that was telling them no. And there were a lot of people around them that were telling them no. And the other people around them were also saying that they couldn’t do it either. And John Sawat tells of the time when he was with John Phan. This woman came and she started complaining, “I’m just a poor person. I have no part of me. I have no potential within me.” And John Phan got really fierce with her. He said, “You’re the person destroying yourself.” And the reason he got fierce with her was probably because he had had to be fierce with himself, with that voice in himself. The Ajahns rarely talk about times when they’re discouraged in the practice, but occasionally. Read a passage here and there. Ajahn Mahambo has a nice passage where he talks about how he was in a little hut in the forest one time, feeling very discouraged about his practice. And off in the distance you could hear a village festival, like the music we can hear tonight. Off in the distance. And he started feeling sorry for himself. He said, “At least these people know how to have a good time. I’m here miserable.” But then he stopped to think, “Where are they going with their good time? At least I’m on a good path.” There are a lot of people out in the world who have had the opportunity of following this good path, but they said no. “At least I’m headed in the right direction.” That was the attitude he had. And that’s the attitude you should carry with you, that you’re headed in the right direction. There are so many people who deliberately do things that are horrible. We actually have people who are planning war, as if it were a good thing. You’re not headed in that direction. You’re trying to straighten out your mind. As the Buddha said, every thought to abandon something unskillful inside is a skillful thought. Just the thought that you would like to abandon unskillful thoughts, that’s a skillful thought. Nourish that. See its value. Value your good intentions. Because they’re the basis of the path, and your ability to stick with it.

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