Just One Person

October 1, 2024

Chan Soi used to like to say that with all the people in the world, you have only one person, yourself, for which you’re responsible. You have members of the family, other people you have connections with, but you can’t really be responsible for their actions. Our problem is that many of us are not even responsible for our own actions. We let our behavior depend on other people. If they treat us nicely, we treat them nicely. And if they don’t treat us nicely, we’re going to get back at them. It’s placing all the blame on them. We’re not here for a blame game. We’re here to figure out why we’re suffering. And it comes from our actions. Other people can do really bad things, but the fact that we’re suffering from their bad things comes from our own lack of skill. This is why, when we meditate, we close our eyes. We’re not out there looking at the world. We’re looking into the mind. First, giving it a good place to stay so you can look at it well. Try to get to know your breath really well. Settle in. As the Buddha said, “Leap upward, leap in.” The word can be either way. “Pakundati.” Leap into the breath. Grow confident in the breath. Settled in the breath. Absorbed in the breath. Resolved in the breath. Because you want to get the mind really, firmly absorbed in the breath. Established here. Implanted here. So you can watch it carefully. If it’s slipping off into the past, slipping off into the future, it’s hard to watch it. When it’s all gathered right here, it’s a lot easier to watch. So, bring it right here. Settle in right here. This is your place right now. It’s whatever’s happening in the world, let that go. Because that’s not your responsibility. Your responsibility is looking after your mind, because that’s the source of all your actions. And your actions, of course, are the source of whether you’re going to suffer or not. So you want to look here really carefully. And have a strong sense of your own responsibility. This is why the Buddha doesn’t throw away your sense of self too quickly. We read so much about not-self, not-self, not-self. People even interpret it as no-self. The Buddha never said that. But he does talk about making yourself your own mainstay. Making yourself your own, basically, prosecutor. That’s just looking after your actions. And if you’re doing something that’s really not right, you’ve got to tell yourself, “This is not right.” Other people can give you some ideas about what’s right and wrong. They can point out mistakes in your behavior. But you’re the one who’s watching all the time. Or at least can be watching all the time. So take advantage of that fact. And have a strong sense that you’re responsible for your actions. And you’re going to benefit from acting skillfully. So you’ve got three basic kinds of self right here. The producer, the consumer, and the commentator, or the observer. And you want to train them all well. Because who else are you going to be able to depend on? The path is not going to happen on itself. And you can’t sit back and say, “Well, may all the path factors come together.” You have to do the factors. After all, you’re doing your aggregates right now. You’re doing your feelings. You’re doing your perceptions, your thought fabrications, your consciousness. You’ve been doing your sense of the body. This is why the Buddha said that all of the aggregates depend on the fourth one, thought fabrications. That’s what takes the potentials coming from your past actions and turns them into your present experiences. So you’re playing a huge role right here. So you’ve got to be very clear about that. And accept responsibility for what you’re doing. Think about the Buddha’s instructions to Rahula. Think about looking at his intentions before he acted. Looking at the action while he’s doing it to see what results are coming. And then looking at the results over the long term. He uses the phrase, “This action I want to do. This action I am doing. This action I have done.” Assume responsibility. Have a strong sense that this is your field. This is your range. We really can make a difference. The world outside can be totally insane. There’s a lot out there that we can’t do anything about. There are areas where you can do something. The prime area is right here. Right here in the heart. So focus your attention here. Bring the mind to the breath. And watch it very carefully. If there’s anything that’s disturbing the mind, just let it go. As the Buddha said, try to be committed to relinquishment. Because it’s so easy to follow a thought sprout, you might call it. Little thoughts come sprouting up here and there. You want to follow through. Where is this one going to take me? Where is that one going to go? You look at it out of curiosity. You look at it out of desire for entertainment. You’ve got to change that attitude. We tend to think that the more entertainment we have inside, the more thoughts we have inside, the wealthier we are. But again, the Buddha says the mind can show some of its potentials only when you let go of its little entertainments, its worries, its doubt about things. It’s allowed to be here, present, for what’s actually happening right here, right now. If you’re going to fashion anything, and of course you are fashioning things all the time, fashion a state of concentration. You’ve got the elements. You’ve got the breath, which can lead to feelings of pleasure or pain. And you’ve got your awareness. And all the mental events that go along with trying to stay focused. We’re reading today about all the things that Venerable Sariputta saw. So bring all these things, all your mental faculties right here. You don’t have to sort them out by name. But just have a sense that everything you’re thinking about, everything you’re feeling, everything you’re interested in, it’s all right here. And maintain that sense of fully focused awareness. And that way you see things you didn’t see before, because everything is gathered right here. In this way you take your sense of responsibility and you develop it in the most skillful way. Remind yourself that if you don’t do this, nobody’s going to do it for you. And if you don’t do it now, you don’t really know how much longer you’re going to have to do this. How much more time you have. Because you do have this moment right here, right now. So give this moment the attention it deserves. And be ruthless in cutting away anything that would pull you away. Have that kind of determination. We’re also reading today about Pukasati, who became a non-returner very shortly before he died. The Buddha may have sensed, as he was teaching Pukasati, that Pukasati didn’t have much more time. So he taught him about determination. Determination is basically having one set of desires that you really focus on. And you’ll have to do battle with other desires that might pull you away. But you maintain this sense of focus on this is what you really want. This is where you’re going to stay. This is what you want to bring into being. A state of concentration where you can see the mind clearly. And figure out what you’re doing that’s skillful, what you’re doing that’s not skillful. And sorting things out with no sense of nostalgia, no sense of attachment. And having a clear sense that what you do matters. Be careful about what you’re doing right now. That requires your full attention, all of your mental faculties. With that kind of concentration, bound to change things in the mind. This is the message of the Four Noble Truths. We’ve been acting in ways that lead to suffering. We’ve got to change the way we act. Which means you can’t simply wish for the path to come together. You have to take responsibility. So yes, you are doing this and yes, you will benefit from it. And you are the one who’s going to pass judgment so you can do it better and better. There will come a point where you don’t need these senses of you anymore. That’s pretty far down the path. The sense of “I am” is one of the last fetters to go. So even though it may be a fetter, you find that you can use it if you approach it skillfully. So when you let it go, it’s not out of dislike or fear or a sense of obligation someone else told you you have to let go of your sense of self. You’ve taken it as far as it can go. It does what it needs to do. And then you don’t need it anymore. That’s when you can let it go. Because you’ve found something a lot better. So this is where that sense of you have just one person that you’re responsible for. And you develop it in the direction where the sense of person eventually, of course, will drop away. But in the meantime, use it well.

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