Confidence & Conviction

March 26, 2018

Chan-su-wat would often say to start your meditation with an attitude of confidence and conviction. Conviction that this is a good path that we’re on, and that we live in a world where people have followed this path and gained the results that the Buddha promised. As he said, that’s the miracle of instruction. A path that actually gives the promised results. There are so many paths out there that don’t deliver. He was one time asked by one of his students, “Why don’t you show your psychic powers more? How about a miracle of mind-reading or a miracle of forecasting future events?” And the Buddha said those things lead to more doubt than they do to conviction for a lot of people. They feel there must be some trick. But there is the miracle of the teaching, a teaching that gives the results that are promised. So have conviction that we live in a world where people have gotten the promised results. Then have confidence that you can do it, that this path does lead to a goal that you’ll be happy to reach and that you’re able to do it. The goal, nirvana, may seem far away, but it’s a path. It’s done step by step by step. So you just keep doing the next step, the next step, and the point where things begin to open up in the mind comes without warning. So you can’t anticipate, “When is it going to come? When is it going to come?” There’s right anticipation. If you notice the factors of the path that we chanted just now, right anticipation is not one of the factors of the path. It’s right practice that gets the results. As the Buddha explained with an image one time, you can do the practice without making a wish, or you can do the practice with making a wish. What matters is that you actually do the practice, the wishes on their own, aside from motivating you to practice. Don’t really accomplish anything. It’s actually doing the next step, the next step. In this case, it’s the next breath, the next breath, or this breath, this breath, this breath. As you get more observant and begin to see the more subtle things inside, you realize what the Buddha said was true, that there is a path to the end of suffering that is right here inside you, qualities that you can develop within yourself. When you think about the others who have followed this path and gotten results, it’s good to remember that they weren’t superhuman. They did push, sometimes, the limits of what human beings can do. But they weren’t superhuman. Even the Buddha himself started out as a person with all kinds of defilements. He used qualities that we all have in potential. He used them to overcome his problems. So whatever problem you face in your meditation, it’s not new. It’s not some unheard-of problem that has never been approached before. People have come from many walks of life, many backgrounds, many types–men, women, children, lay, ordained, young, old, educated, uneducated. They’ve all faced these problems and figured them out, figured out the solution. And as the Buddha said, you notice that all the people who have done this, they’re human beings. You’re a human being. They can do it. Why can’t you? Ananda taught this message one time. He’s calling it a kind of conceit. It’s the self-view that’s actually useful on the path. We hear so much about not-self, not-self. But it’s good to remember that you do need a certain provisional sense of self, just as you need a provisional sense of the world. That can give you the confidence that you can do this path and it’s worth doing. So look at what idea you have of yourself and adjust it to remind yourself, “I can do this. I can find out why I’m causing myself unnecessary suffering, and I can figure out an alternative so I can let go of the causes of suffering.” That’s what letting go involves. You can’t just tell yourself, “Let go, let go.” You’ve got to figure things out. Why are you holding on? There’s some advantage to holding on, but there are disadvantages as well. When you see just the disadvantages and tell yourself to let go, it doesn’t work. You have to figure out, “Why was I holding on to begin with? Or what do I think I’m getting out of holding on right now?” And when you see that clearly, and you can see that there is an alternative, that’s when you let go. In fact, the mind lets go without you having to tell it. It’s that quick. So there are problems here in the mind, but there are also the qualities in the mind that we can all develop to help us to overcome those problems. The Buddha and the noble disciples of the past have given their advice. There may be some personal ins and outs to your own personal suffering that require that you take their advice and adjust it a little bit, but the basic principles are all the same. As John Foong would say about Ajahn Man, “People are all the same. They’re different, but when it comes down to the basic qualities, we’re all the same.” The different parts of the mind are things about our own cultural background. The basic principles, though, are the same for everyone. We’re all suffering for the same reason. And the path out of that suffering is something that we all follow in the same way. People have done this before, and they were people. You’re a person. They can do it, and so can you. You’ve got to have that kind of conviction. And as I said, whatever problem comes up, it’s a matter of this is a problem that has been solved before. So ask yourself, “The people who solved it, how did they solve it? What did they see that you’re not seeing right now?” And look, be observant. Because both the problem and the solution are right here. They’re not far off. We’re blind at the moment, but that blindness is something that can be cured. This is why we develop mindfulness. This is why we develop alertness. All the good qualities of mind that are needed to get the mind into concentration. And then to observe it and what way in the mind, when the mind is even in concentration, is still not quiet. What little disturbances are there? It’s those little disturbances that set the big ones into motion. So you want to get the mind very, very still and very alert. And start asking some questions. In fact, that may be one of the issues. Why we don’t see things happening right in front of us or happening right in us is because we’re asking the wrong questions. So try some of the Buddhist questions. Where is suffering? How is it caused? What can I do to abandon the cause so that the suffering will go away? Many times our problem is that we try to abandon the suffering without paying attention to the cause, and it doesn’t work. It’s like going into your home and seeing that it’s full of smoke and trying to put out the fire. You want the smoke to end, you’ve got to find the fire. The fire’s there in the house, and the smoke may obscure it to some extent. But if you’re quiet enough, you can tell, “Okay, which direction is the smoke coming from?” You head in that direction, you’ll find the fire. That’s what you put out. And then the problem of the smoke will take care of itself. So the cause of suffering is here, suffering is right here. But the potential qualities that will form the path to the end of suffering, they’re right here as well. So try to maintain that sense of conviction, that sense of confidence. This is a good path. Other people have followed it before and gotten results. And you’re capable of getting results too. If you create the path within you. All the raw materials are right here.

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