

A Mantra

Alan Zundel at the HeartAwake Center, May 30th 2007

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So a couple of weeks ago, I think, Phyllis said she likes it when I give you practical techniques. So I thought tonight I'd give you a practical technique. This is a technique for cutting through some of the attachments, particularly to mental formulations, ideas in your head, and it's a mantra, a very powerful mantra; I'm giving you permission to use it. [laughs] Not too many people use it, but it can be very effectively used in the right spirit.

Before I talk about that, though, I want to say one word about techniques, and that is they have their upside and their downside. Their upside, obviously, is if they work they can help you get unstuck from certain sticking points. Generally we're usually stuck at one point or another during our lives, and techniques can help nudge you beyond that, whatever that attachment to your mind or in your mind happens to be. The downside of it is that it reinforces the notion that your mind is in charge, because the technique is something that you think of in your mind, and your mind draws upon to use. And so it reinforces this notion that somehow your mind has access to these other states of consciousness, and using techniques can get there, in and out—it becomes a gatekeeper, so to speak. What you don't want to do is to make your mind into the gatekeeper of other states of mind. Because to me that's magic, that's not trying to come closer to God or realization or whatever you want to call it, which is really the seeing through the mind and letting go of the mind and things like that. So it has its upside and downside.

This particular mantra, this particular technique—like other mantras, it's a string of words that you use. Periodically you can just intersperse this in your day to day comments; particularly in discussions with other people it's very useful. And as I said it can help you cut through attachments, in addition to having other beneficial effects on relationships. So the mantra is this:

'But I could be wrong.'

And there's variations that are allowed; you can say, 'but *of course* I could be wrong,' or you can say—

[Voice:] 'Certainly.'

'Certainly I could be wrong.' [laughs]

[Another voice:] Or 'and.'

‘*And I could be wrong.*’ But the general concept here is that you *could* be wrong, that whatever statement you’re making or opinion you’re expressing, whatever thought you’re having in your mind, could be incorrect—and likely is at least partially incorrect—and therefore you don’t want to cling to it as something absolute. So you intersperse this at various times during your conversations, and it can be helpful in cutting through attachments. Of course, I could be wrong [*laughs*], but I’ve found it to be effective.

If you take just in simple domestic situations, one of the side beneficial effects is it can help lubricate the gears of social intercourse. Say for example the difference between saying, “I think you moved my car keys,” and, “I think you moved my car keys, but I could be wrong.” Now, there’s a very subtle distinction; it still implies an accusation, but in the first case there’s a bald accusation, and the other person’s reaction is spontaneous—I think the first movement of somebody’s mind when presented with that, is defensiveness. And it tends towards an argument: “No, I didn’t move your car keys.” “Yeah, I think you did.” “Well, I’m sure I didn’t because you always forget them, remember—”, and then there’s a back and forth, trying to prove one or the other has to be right. But when you add that phrase, ‘I could be wrong,’ that’s shifting it slightly so that you’re saying, “Well, this is what seems to me to be a true statement, but I’m opening this up for further discussion and the possibility that you can give me greater insight into this.” That’s the implication, right?

So it takes a little of the sting out of it, and if the person responds in that sense they’ll say, “Well, maybe I did, but I think you left them where you usually leave them,” or something like this; “Of course *I* could be wrong”—they’ll even pick up the habit from you and everybody will be happier, right? So in family relationships, adding that phrase to statements can only help [*laughs*]; I can’t see any way that it can hurt. When you’re in conversations with your spouse, or your partner, or your children, or your parents, or your friends even—anybody that you’re expressing opinions to, particularly when those opinions have anything to do with that person—adding this proviso of ‘I could be wrong’ tones it down a little bit, and shows a little bit of humility in our own sense of perspective about things.

On a larger playing field, the political life—here is an area where people tend to form attachments to views and then use them as clubs against each other. Stating an opinion about some matter in politics without any sense that you could possibly be wrong, and then somebody else states the opposite opinion and then you start fighting about it, and someone has to be right and someone has to be wrong, someone has to be victorious and someone has to be vanquished—that sets up a struggle between people, and results frequently in animosity and devaluing of other people. The defense of the point of view becomes more important than treating other people with respect, and remembering not only that we could be wrong but they could have something that we could learn from in sharing different points of view.

So, for example—you still have opinions, you can still express your point of view—you could say, “I think we should get out of Iraq today, but of course I could be wrong.” That makes it a little easier to have a conversation. Or from the other side, “I think we need to be in—” is it pronounced *Ee-raq* or *Eye-raq*? I think it’s *Ee-raq*. Well, Afghanistan, then. [*laughs*] “I think

we need to be in Afghanistan to fight terrorism there, but I could be wrong.” So it’s inviting further conversation, reflection, discussion, and at the same time detaching you from that tendency to treat your opinions about it as absolute and having an absolute value. They have value; our perspectives on things that we have to take actions in regard to have value, but they can always be supplemented, corrected, expanded, in conversation with other people. So adding that statement reminds yourself that you don’t want to become attached to that opinion, you don’t want it to become the ultimate thing that you identify with. It’s just that, it’s a thought in your mind, something arising from a perspective that could have more or less connection with reality. So, ‘here’s my political opinion but I could be wrong.’

Another area where this is sorely needed, I think, and is very important, is in religion—religious views, religious beliefs. This is a tough one, particularly for Christians, because we’ve been told that it’s an important thing to hold to beliefs firmly, and to defend them and to not question them or doubt them; doubt becomes a sign of a lack of faith. My own opinion—and of course I could be wrong [*laughs*—my own opinion is that Christianity took a bit of a wrong turn when it started emphasizing beliefs over practice, and over faith in the sense of trust in God and loyalty to God, or even loyalty to Jesus as the Messiah or the Christ, and having the correct set of beliefs became the important thing.

Yet it’s just like politics—correct beliefs have value, right? Having the right beliefs about something can lead you to right actions, and having wrong beliefs can lead to wrong actions, but it doesn’t have *ultimate* value and it can always stand correction, or supplement, or further development. So in my own view—and of course this happened in a point of time where it was becoming very political; Constantine was trying to unify the empire so they decided everybody had to have the same beliefs—again it becomes a tool of power; somebody has to be vanquished, somebody has to be the victor, somebody has to be wrong, somebody has to be right. And it closes off conversation, and forces people to at times profess things that they don’t understand even, or they don’t feel has any meaning for them, which doesn’t make any sense really. But again, to say, ‘This is what I believe, but of course I could be wrong,’ that can make it much easier to discuss things with other people who are inevitably going to have a different point of view. Even if they share some fundamental beliefs with you, there’s going to be some areas where they disagree. And by taking some of that sting out of it, again, by saying ‘but of course I could be wrong,’ you make it more possible for you to have a conversation and learn from each other.

And also you cut this attachment to stuff that’s just in your mind. The ultimate value is somewhere beyond that, beyond anything that your mind can encompass, right? Your mind is too small to encompass Truth, to encompass God, so you want to get beyond holding on to the things of the mind as though they have ultimate value. So, “I believe Jesus was the Christ, but of course I could be wrong;” “I believe that the Buddha teaches us the path to enlightenment, but I could be wrong;”—whatever it is, you could be wrong, I could be wrong. Reminding yourself of that, expressing that statement, makes it easier for other people to deal with you, and for you to deal with your own mind.

So, this phrase comes in handy in a lot of respects. And really the aim, as with all mantras, is to make it such a part of your own sensibility, such a part of your own perspective, that it becomes internalized and it no longer even has to be expressed. You can tell even in your tone of voice when you express something, that that disclaimer is there. ‘Here’s what I believe’—you have that sense in your voice, and in your mind and heart, that this is open to further conversation, that you *want* to hear what other people have to say about it, and that you offer it as something that you think that has value, but you also have the humility to recognize that maybe it doesn’t have as much value as you think it does. So I think this particular mantra can be useful in a variety of situations, and has more than one beneficial effect.

But again, of course [*laughs*], I could be wrong.

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