

Developing Confidence

Excerpt from *Ruling Your World*, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, c 2006. Pp. 36-42.

To develop confidence, we must become skillful in gathering virtue every day. Most of us wake up in the morning after not having had quite enough sleep. Feeling a little groggy, we stumble into the bathroom or the kitchen, and then we continue to stumble through our day without much forethought. We're habituated to a self-centered view—one that's coming from always feeling slightly pissed off, depressed, or anxious. Expecting to flip "What about me?" overnight toward becoming contented, joyful, accommodating, and wise may seem as realistic as last night's dream.

If you want to get your body in shape, you don't expect a radical difference after one week of training. Nor do you start by spending five hours a day in the gym. With a little bit of walking, running, lifting, and stretching, you feel more refreshed and inspired by the day—and before you know it, you're stronger, you've got more energy, and you're getting better sleep.

In the same way, the most practical way to ensure forward movement on the path of rulership is to train for a short time each day in changing our attitude—just ten percent. Overdoing it could derail the whole process, like running too far too fast, or lifting more weight than we can bear. That's why in the beginning I encourage people to meditate in ten-minute periods, without the goal of seeing immediate results. The sensible approach is to tell ourselves, "I can still be irritated ninety percent of the time. But with ten percent of my mind and heart, I'll try putting others first."

When I wake up in the morning, first I stabilize my mind by placing it on the breath. When a thought arises, I acknowledge it and return my focus to the breath. Then I orient my mind in the direction of how I can be helpful, how I can learn more that day, or how I can raise my windhorse. I foster compassion and rouse *prajna*—a Sanskrit word that means "best knowledge"—about how I'm going to live my day. By stabilizing my mind on the breath, I'm putting my feet on the ground, like the tiger. By contemplating meaningful thoughts, I'm uplifting my mind with discipline, like the lion. I'm setting my attitude. Life is always trying to dismount us from the saddle of basic goodness. I know that if my mind is in the right place at the beginning, I am going to have the upper hand in ruling my day.

Developing confidence in basic goodness is a twenty-four-hour-a-day practice. In our short formal practice—ten minutes or so every morning—we use the essential neutrality of our mind to let positive forces permeate our being. We are resting in our inherent peace, honing our skills to be a better person, and gathering the strength to live the rest of our day well. We are gaining more insight, removing veil upon veil of hesitation, ignorance, and doubt....

Then we step into our life and apply our contemplation to our daily activities by engaging in virtue. Connecting with heaven each day, we are able to bring virtue into the earth of our daily world by using relative *prajna*—knowing how things work

and thinking accurately. Having enlarged our mind in meditation, we continue to cultivate thoughts and actions that take us in a positive direction—away from the “me” plan and toward peace, compassion, and wisdom. When the events of the day destabilize our mind, we use mindfulness and awareness to bring it back to our breath or to the topic of our morning contemplation.

... We’re often confused about our purpose in the world, because we mistakenly associate worldly activity with negative emotion. We think that being successful means accomplishing what we want with ambition and greed. Being trapped by negative emotions and perpetuating them is not worldly success—it is worldly ignorance. People often say, “Ignorance is bliss.” Actually, ignorance is pain. Knowledge is bliss. Developing certainty in the view of basic goodness and respecting the law of karma—causes and conditions—are ways to cause happiness.

Karma moves in two directions. If we act virtuously, the seed we plant will result in happiness. If we act nonvirtuously, suffering results. The words *virtue* and *nonvirtue* may sound moralistic, but karma is not based on any kind of judgment. It’s just how reality works. If we’re at the cosmic bank and we give the teller self-obsession and anger, what we get in exchange is based on the currency of pain. If we give the teller generosity or patience, what we get in return is based on the currency of happiness. The happiness we get in exchange for virtue could happen on the spot, or it could be delayed until sometime in the future.

One Tibetan word for “worldly” means “fearless.” This is different from the fearlessness of the ruler, which starts with the open-mindedness and precision developed through meditation. It describes a world where we have no fear of our confusion. We indulge our anger and greed as means to solve our problems, without fear of the repercussions. We think that we can get mad and there won’t be any consequences. We’re counting on karma not working, or at least disappearing until we’re finished yelling at somebody.

If this state of karmic denial were a place, we’d all own time-shares there. But it isn’t a place, it’s a view—“What about me?” We are fearless in putting ourselves first. We fearlessly get mad, we fearlessly get jealous, we fearlessly feel proud. “What about me?” is the attitude of paupers and fools. It’s like not being afraid of bacteria. Either we don’t know about infection, or we think we’re immune to it, so we don’t wash our hands or clean our wounds. We are fearless because we’re ignorant. We’re ignoring how karma works.

The only way to loosen the grasp of karma is to engage in virtue. We don’t have to isolate ourselves from the world to do this; according to the tradition of Shambhala, being in the world can be the basis of spiritual success. It all depends on our attitude. Most of the time we are engaged in either virtue or nonvirtue. We are attracting the blessing energy of drala and strengthening windhorse—the ability to bring about success—because we’re rising above aggression. Or we’re accumulating drip and inviting obstacles because we’re sinking into the “me” plan.

Playing the game of ten percent means slowing down, stepping back, and asking, “What is my view? Am I fearless with wisdom, ready to help others? Or am I fearless with ignorance, ready to indulge in negativity?” Drawing upon the reservoir

of experience we had in our morning contemplation will help us remember that we already decided earlier in the day to use compassion. We're not going to change our mind now and solidify a bad mood into anger. By returning to the theme of our contemplation instead of reacting to the ups and downs of life, we are building cloud banks of virtue. Every day we gain a little more insight into the power of the mind—how it creates confusion and how thinking accurately and acting virtuously keep us grounded in our own wisdom.

That ten-minute period of sitting is important. We can stabilize our mind and then contemplate suffering, impermanence, or selflessness. We can contemplate how to lead a good life, or how we can do something meaningful today. We can contemplate what others might need. Perhaps we simply try to kindle a small ember of compassion in our heart and take that into ten percent of our day. Although this warmth might be dwarfed by the raging inferno of the "What about me?" contemplation next door, later in the day, compassion seems to come more naturally, and to make more sense.