

The Protection of Goodwill

October 11, 2016

There's a passage in the Canon where a yakkha comes to see the Buddha, and says that as long as you're mindful, you're protecting yourself from all kinds of dangers. The Buddha replies, though, that basically that's not the case. You need mindfulness but you also need goodwill, goodwill for all the beings of the world. That's a protection too.

If you simply have mindfulness but without the goodwill, it gets dry. Goodwill is what gives your mindfulness the strength it needs in order to remind you of what's good to do and you can carry through with that as well.

Because it's one thing to be mindful—i.e. to keep something in mind—nuy it's something else to actually act on what you're keeping in mind. If you know that it's good but if you don't have the strength and if you don't have the motivation to do it, it's hard to do what's skillful even when you can remember what's skillful and you know what's skillful.

So it's good to develop goodwill, compassion: thinking of all the suffering people in the world and how much all the strife in the world comes from the fact that people are suffering. Of course, the strife causes more suffering. It just goes around and around and around like that. You've got to feel sorry for the people who are tied up in that.

You want to get out, but at the same time you have to have compassion for the people who seem tied up. Having compassion for yourself, of course, means that you want to get out, too. But when you have goodwill and compassion for all, that helps to guarantee that in your efforts to get out, you act skillfully. Because if you act unskillfully in your efforts to get out, you get pulled right back in.

So have some compassion for all the suffering beings of the world—yourself included, but remember everybody else around you here, too. The only people who are not suffering right now are arahants. Which means that the vast majority of the world is being driven by suffering. And you have to have some compassion for all the mistakes they make under the force of suffering.

In that way, you protect yourself and you protect others. As the Buddha said, when you're developing mindfulness, you're protecting yourself directly but it's also protecting others. When you're developing goodwill, you're working for the good of others, but it's also for your own good. These qualities work together. So make sure that you practice them together so that they can be strong.