

Protection

September 24, 2007

When you stay here in the monastery, you're in a protected environment. To the extent that we can shape this environment, it's shaped to protect your meditation, to protect your state of mind. So it's often the case that when people are here, they find themselves letting down their defenses. But when you leave the monastery, you've got to get your defenses back up again. You've got to be your own protection. It's not just the amount of sights and sounds and smells and tastes and tactile sensations that bombard you when you leave the monastery, it's the values that surround you, the energy of the people that surround you. You've got to learn how to resist them. Otherwise, they come in and destroy whatever peace of mind you have. Whatever your concentration, whatever your insights, they get scattered.

This is why restraint of the senses is an important part of the meditation. And the meditation itself can be used as a type of protection. In other words, you have to maintain it. You can't just let it go, thinking now that you have other responsibilities, other things going on, you can put the meditation aside and pick it up to do only in the quiet moments of the day. You've got to maintain it as much as you can throughout the day, because the problems aren't all out there. The problems are in here as well.

It's like germs. Different people can go into the same germ-laden environment, and some of them get sick, and some of them don't. The ones who don't get sick are the ones who've got good powers of resistance. Those who get sick are the ones whose resistance is weak. After all, the things in the world—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations—can't really do anything to you unless you have greed, anger, and delusion inside, which we all have. We're born with these things. So we're carrying latent diseases within us already. It's simply a matter of the outside germs aggravating those diseases.

We're already in a weakened state, already in a diseased state, so we have to be careful, as with anyone who has a disease: There's food that you have to avoid, certain situations you have to avoid, and it's the same with these diseases in the mind.

Now, when we're in the outside world, we don't think of ourselves as being in the outside world. It's simply what's there. But when you're in an unprotected environment, you've got two things to watch out for: what's coming in and what's lying latent in your mind, what could be easily disturbed. So you've got to be

careful, you've got to be vigilant, not to pick up diseases from outside, and to watch out for any tendency in the mind to go for those diseases. Sometimes you hear that the problem of the mind is that we're subject to social conditioning, and if it weren't for that social conditioning, the mind would be in its happy natural state. That's not the case at all. If we didn't have these potentials for disease inside, the outside diseases couldn't infect us. If it weren't for our own greed, anger, and delusion, the greed, anger and delusion in the outside world wouldn't touch us.

It's because we have these problems inside that the mind gets aggravated by things outside. So you have to watch out.

The skills you learn as you're meditating here are your protection. To begin with, you're giving the mind a place to stay so that it doesn't have to jump around and land on things that come in from outside. Always remember, you've got the choice. You can stay right here. Try to make right here as comfortable as possible, so that the mind is more inclined to stay right here.

And you have to be aware of picking up other people's energies.

My teacher had a student who gave massages for a living, and one of the reasons he came to study with Ajaan Fuang was because he needed protection from his patients. When you give a massage, you can pick up energy from people. Some people have some really negative energy. If you're sensitive, you pick things up from them and you get sick as well.

He had one really extreme case, a monk who had gone to live in a cave and had made a lot of changes in the cave. The spirits inhabiting the cave were not happy. So they hovered around him and tried to make him sick whenever they could. But because he was a monk, apparently they couldn't get in too far. But the monk was complaining that he didn't feel right. His back ached, his legs ached, his arms ached, so Ajaan Fuang's student gave him a massage. He immediately started having visions of unfriendly spirits attacking him. It scared him so much that he went out and threw up. He could feel the negative energy coming in from the body of the patient he was massaging.

So even though we're not giving massages to other people, still if we leave parts of our mind-body complex unoccupied, things can come in. People's negative energy can inhabit parts of our body. Some people tend to suck this sort of thing up, especially when they try to be sympathetic. When we're with someone who's going through problems in life, someone who's suffering, we tend to open up wide and absorb everything they're putting out, thinking that somehow we're being helpful. Well, we aren't helping them at all, and at the same time, we are leaving ourselves defenseless.

So try to keep your awareness filling your body as much as possible, keep good breath energy filling your body as much as possible, even in situations where you try to be sympathetic with other people, *especially* in situations where you try to be sympathetic. If you open yourself up their bad energy, you're weakening yourself, and when you're weakened, how can you help them? You're in worse shape yourself. You've got to maintain your strength if you're going to be helpful to others. You've got to keep this attitude in mind.

So, one, keep the breath comfortable; two, allow good breath energy to fill the body, keep it filling the body as constantly as possible. That gives a lot of protection right there.

These skills that you learn while you're meditating here are not just for while you're sitting with your eyes closed. They're meant to be used in all situations. And these are not just the concentration skills, they're the insight skills as well. Things come in and the mind is like Velcro. It just sticks to all kinds of stuff. You've got to watch for that habit in your mind. One way of cutting off those little Velcro hooks is to keep reminding yourself: Where's the stress right now? The things that you latch on to as being especially true or especially real: You have to remind yourself, are they really so real? Are they really that true? You can think in terms of their inconstancy, their stressfulness, the fact that they're not self. That helps cut through those little Velcro hooks.

This is a teaching we've heard again and again and again, and it doesn't seem to have much power. You think about it and hasn't solved much of your suffering yet. Well, you have to be consistent with it. Keep applying it to everything that comes up that the mind clings to. That's when you begin to see its power.

So try to use your combined powers of concentration and insight to keep yourself protected in all sides. Remember that whatever good things you see, they may have their bad side; whatever bad things you see, they may have their good side. Look for it so that your mind can stay in the middle and not get thrown into extremes. In other words, you stay right here, with the breath energy surrounding you, with your weapons of insight that cut down any germs when you see them, any potentials that are going to cause trouble for the mind.

This is not a selfish thing. It's not as if you're just looking after yourself. The stronger you can be, the more you can be a pillar of strength for others. In this way, when you protect yourself, you protect others.

Keep the image of the acrobats in mind. When you maintain your balance, you're much less likely to throw other people off their balance. If they lose their balance, they learn they can lean on you a little bit, because you know how to keep yourself protected and you carry this protection with you wherever you go.