

Scribe Knowledge, Warrior Knowledge

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People in ancient societies made a distinction between warrior knowledge and scribe knowledge. Scribe knowledge is the knowledge that comes from words: knowing definitions, what a word means, how to read texts, that sort of thing. Warrior knowledge is more practical. Simply knowing the names of your enemies doesn't win out over them. You need to know the practices, the techniques, the strategies, the right attitudes that actually help you to win. This is something that comes with experience. And it's a kind of knowledge that also comes from adversity, from going to be battles, from taking on challenges and coming out winning.

The Dhamma is basically warrior knowledge, but most of us learn it first as scribe knowledge. We learn about the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path and all the many lists that the Buddha taught. But when he boiled down the basic teachings, the ones he said were really important, he focused on the wings to awakening, which are lists of qualities of the mind that are going to be needed as you take on your battle with your defilements—all the unskillful things going on in the mind. What this means is that warriors do need a certain amount of scribe knowledge just so they can recognize who's an enemy, who's a friend, and to learn about various techniques and strategies. But then you've got to put that knowledge into practice. And it's in dealing with your own defilements and your own unskillful qualities: That's when you really learn, one, what the words mean and then, two, how they're best put to use.

So as you're sitting here, doing battle with whatever thoughts in the mind want to pull you away from concentration or to get in the way of your discernment, it's good to think of some basic warrior principles. The first one is: Choose your battles. You can't take on every battle or issue that comes your way, otherwise you'll lose all your battles. You've got only so much time and so much energy, so you've got to decide which things are worth fighting for and which things are not. Of course, from the Buddha's point of view, the main battle is inside. As he said, you could win out over thousands of other people but it wouldn't be nearly as honorable or beneficial as winning out over yourself. So remember, this battle in here is the important one. Be willing to lose a few battles outside if that's what's required to be victorious here inside.

The second principle is: Always be on your guard. This is the teaching on heedfulness. Greed, aversion, and delusion don't come along only while you're

sitting and meditating. They come up all the time and, in fact, they're more likely to come up while you're *not* meditating. And they can do a lot of damage. So you have to be prepared to watch out for these things all the time. This is why we practice restraint of the senses. When you look at something, ask yourself: Who's doing the looking? And what qualities of the mind are being nurtured by the way you look? Is lust doing the looking? Is anger doing the looking? Greed? Jealousy? Resentment? If so, that's going to inflame these qualities in the mind.

Your choice of what you look at and how you look at it—and this principle applies to all the senses—is part of a causal chain. And it's happening all the time. You'll find that if you're not careful as you go through the day, it's a lot harder to get the mind to settle down when you finally do try formal meditation. And it's very easy to lose what you've gained.

One of Ajaan Fuang's students was sitting and meditating with him one day in Wat Makut in Bangkok. The session went very well. Then she went home and talked with a friend, and that nice state of mind deteriorated right away. So she went to mention this to him the next day. And he said, "What you did was you took gold and you traded it in for excrement." When you've got a good state of mind going at the end of the meditation, try to maintain it through the day. Protect it. And one of the best ways of protecting it is to be very careful in how you engage with your senses.

So be on the lookout. Every time you look or listen—and this is something you're doing all the time—be careful about which states of mind are giving the directions and which ones are being nurtured by what you're doing and how you're doing it. If anything unskillful comes up, try to nip it right in the bud. It's a lot easier to deal with when you nip it in the bud rather than letting it grow. All too often our attitude is, "It's just a little tiny thought of greed. It's not much of a problem." Or even just the thought that you'd like to think a thought of anger, you'd like to think a thought of lust: It comes and whispers and then it goes away. And if you don't immediately counteract it, you've let it lay the seed for a defilement to suddenly grow. So you've got to be on your guard all the time.

As for dealing with other people, the best way to protect yourself is to have goodwill and develop it in all directions with all beings. On the one hand, if you're spreading thoughts of goodwill, other people will feel a good energy coming from you. And then, two, you'll learn how to trust yourself more. If you do genuinely have goodwill for other people, even difficult people, then you're less likely to act in unskillful ways around them. This means that you can trust yourself more in your dealings with other people. And that's the main area where you want protection: in your actions. So heedfulness and goodwill are your protections.

Restraint of the senses is a protection. These things are what keep you on your guard.

You know the story about the person who wanted to study sword fighting. He goes to his master and asks to learn how to do sword fighting. But instead of teaching the guy how to do sword fighting, the master has him haul water and cut wood. And the guy's complaining, "I'm not learning anything about sword fighting." But then every now and then, the teacher attacks him with a stick. And finally, one day, the young student is ready for the teacher. The teacher attacks with a stick, and the student puts up—I guess the top of the pail—which he uses as his shield. And he realizes that this is what the teacher had been teaching him all along: how to be on your guard all the time, even when you're carrying water, hauling water, chopping wood. That's how you become a good sword fighter.

So have that attitude as you go through the day. Your defilements can come up at any time, so you've got to be prepared for them at any time.

This connects with the third main principle, which is that you've got to think strategically. Being heedful all the time, being on your guard all the time can be really wearing unless you have a source of strength, which is why you don't spend all your time analyzing your defilements and picking them up and beating them up. You've got to get the mind into a state of concentration to give yourself time to rest and gather strength.

As the Buddha said, you can know all the drawbacks of sensuality and yet still go for sensual pleasures if you don't have an alternative kind of pleasure. So you need this other pleasure: the pleasure of concentration; the pleasure of a centered mind to give you strength, to give you an alternative place to feed. Otherwise, the mind's going to go sneak off and feed behind the wall. In other words, it's going to go for different kinds of pleasures and pretend that it's not. But then you'll find that that sneaky part of the mind is going to overthrow all the good things you've done. So you've got to be careful. You've got to feed the mind well.

Think strategically in other ways, too. This evening I was reading a letter from someone who had noticed in the sutta where Buddha's teaching Rahula breath meditation. Before he teaches him breath meditation, he teaches him some contemplations. And one of them is to learn how to see all the elements in the body as "This is not me. This is not mine. This is not my self." And the guy writing the letter said, "Well, wait a minute. In breath meditation, you're focusing on the breath element, which is one of those elements. So what's going on here? If it's not your self, then why focus on it?" You're focusing on it because simply being told that it's not your self is not enough to make you get rid of your attachments to it. You've got to explore it.

To what extent can you really control the breath? Push it and see how far you can go. And you'll find you can go fairly far. You can create a sense of ease; a sense of well-being. And that becomes your nourishment on the path. But after a while, even with whatever mastery you've had of the breath, you find you run up against certain things that you can't control. Even when things are going well in the mind—the concentration is good—the concentration is still a little bit unstable. It requires that you keep tending to it. It's based on fabrication. And so it's got to change. It's got to be inconstant. And that's where you see it. Before, you'd heard it. But now you're trying to push against the principles of inconstancy, stress and not self. You're making the mind as constant and full of ease and as much under control as you can. And, in doing that, you push it up against the wall. You finally find out where that wall is. So this is another way in which you have to think strategically, because the unskillful states of the mind are very clever.

Sometimes a frontal attack doesn't work, so you have to attack them from the side. Sometimes you have to pretend like you're not doing battle, but you're watching. You're very careful. And you keep pushing, pushing, pushing as you can: from this direction, from that direction. This is why ingenuity is required. This is how you turn your knowledge of those lists of the Dhamma into actual warrior knowledge. It's not just a matter of doing as you were told. Sometimes you have to turn things around a little bit to see what's going to work precisely for you.

This is why the Buddha didn't say that there's one particular meditation technique for each particular defilement. For example, the contemplation of the body, like the chant we had just now, is not just for lust. It's for other things, too. It can also be used for pride. It also can be used for the mind's tendency to say, "Well, I don't want to push things too much tonight because if I sit for long periods of time, it's going to make my legs ache and maybe it'll do damage to my nerves, or damage to the blood vessels, or maybe cut off the blood to my legs, or whatever." But then when you think about it, what you have got in those legs? Just flesh and bone and skin. And at some point, you're going to have to let go of it anyhow. So you might as well get good use out of it while you've got it. When you think of it that way, the contemplation of the body can actually give you more strength to sit for longer periods of time.

So be alive to the fact that different contemplations can be used for lots of different purposes. Use your ingenuity, remembering these principles. Choose your battles. Think strategically. Be on your guard all the time.

And finally, be prepared for setbacks. This is normal. Every warrior is going to have to lose some battles. Think about George Washington during the War of Independence. There were times when it looked pretty hopeless. But he didn't let

himself get discouraged. There's going to be a back and a forth in any battle. Hopefully, you learn from the back and forth. Ajaan Maha Boowa's image is of someone who goes into the ring to do battle as a boxer and loses. But when you lose, you try to figure out, "Why did I lose?" Sometimes the winner will show a weak side that you didn't notice before. But you notice it and then you can remember it for the next time. If you don't engage the opponent, you'll never know where the opponent's strengths and weaknesses are. So be prepared to lose, but learn from the loss. Learn from the defeat and make sure that it's not a total defeat, that you're able to come back—which also means don't get discouraged.

We like to hear these stories of the great ajaans who took one step up the path, after another, after another, after another. And it sounds as if there were no setbacks. But every ajaan has had setbacks. In fact, those are the things you can take heart from, because *they* took heart. They realized that they didn't have to get discouraged and they didn't give up. Remember that losing out, having a miserable night of concentration or having your defilements flare up after you thought you'd had them taken care of, is not a sign of total defeat. It's just a sign that you learned one lesson. But there are other lessons to learn.

So keep these four principles in mind. Oftentimes our problem is when we decide we want to be warriors, we don't know anything about being a warrior. We just take on any battle, that comes our way. And we do it in a very naïve way. You've got to choose your battles, be on your guard, use your ingenuity to be strategic, and keep your spirits up all the time. That's how you're going to come out winning.