Protection

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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. 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 realize 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 they 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 put the meditation aside and just pick it up during your quiet points of the day. You’ve got to maintain it as much as you can, 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, delusion, and the mind, 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. So 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 are certain foods you have to avoid, certain situations you have to avoid. It’s the same with these diseases in the mind. Now we’re in the outside world. But don’t think of yourself being in the outside world. Simply say, “This is 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 also 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. You’ve got to be vigilant not to pick up diseases from outside and to watch out for your tendency in the mind to go for those diseases. Sometimes you hear about the problem with 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. Well, that’s not the case at all. If we didn’t have these potential germs inside or these potential diseases inside, the outside diseases couldn’t infect us. If it weren’t for our own greed, anger, and delusion, the greed, anger, and delusion of the outside world wouldn’t touch us. Just because we have these problems inside, that’s why the mind gets aggravated by things outside. So we have to watch out. So the skills you’re learning as you’re meditating here, these are your protection. One, giving the mind a place where it can stay so it doesn’t have to jump around, land on things that come in from outside. Always remember, you’ve got the choice. You can stay right here and try to make right here as comfortable as possible so the mind is more inclined to stay right here. You have to beware of picking up other people’s energy. My teacher had a student who gives massages for a living. One of the reasons he came to study with the Chan Fu is because he needed protection from his patients. When you give a massage, you can pick up energy from people, and some people have some really negative energy. If you’re sensitive and you pick it up from them, you get sick as well. There was one really extreme case. There was a monk who’d gone into a cave and made a lot of changes in the cave. The spirits inhabiting the cave were not happy, so they kind of hovered around him, trying to make him sick whenever they could. But because he was a monk, apparently he couldn’t get in too far. The monk was complaining that he didn’t feel right. His back ached, his legs ached, his arms ached. So this guy gave him a massage. He immediately started having visions of these unfriendly spirits attacking him, scaring him so much that he went out and threw up. He could feel this 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 body, parts of our mind, body, and complex unoccupied, things can come in. People’s negative energy can inhabit parts of our body. Some people tend to suck it up, especially when they’re trying to be sympathetic, someone who’s going through problems in life, someone who’s suffering. We tend to open wide up and absorb everything that they’re putting up, thinking that somehow we’re being helpful. But we’re not helping them at all. At the same time, we’re 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’re trying to be sympathetic with other people, especially in situations when you’re trying to be sympathetic. Because if you open yourself up to their bad energy, you’re weakening yourself. And when you’re weakened, how can you help them? You’re in a 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, keeping the breath comfortable. Two, allowing good breath energy to fill the body. Keep it filling the body as constantly as possible. There’s a lot of protection right there. So 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 it’s not just the concentration skills. It’s the insight skills as well. Things come in and you find the mind is like Velcro. It just picks up all kinds of stuff. You’ve got to watch for that habit in the mind. One way of cutting off those little Velcro hooks is to keep reminding yourself, “Where is the stress right now?” The things that you latch onto as being especially true or especially real, you have to remind yourself, “Well, are they really that real? Are they really that true?” You can think in terms of your inconstancy, your stressfulness, the fact that there are not self. That helps cut through those little Velcro hooks. Again, this is a teaching we’ve heard again and again and again, and it doesn’t seem to have much power. We think about it and it hasn’t solved much of our suffering yet. Well, you have to be consistent with it. Keep applying it to everything that comes up. That’s when you begin to see its power. Try to use your combined powers of concentration and insight to keep yourself protected on 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 your mind can stay in the middle. Do not get thrown off into extremes. In other words, you stay right here. The breath energy is surrounding you and your weapons of insight to cut down any germs when you see them, any potentials that are going to cause trouble for the mind. Again, this is not a selfish thing. It’s not like you’re just looking after yourself. The stronger you can be, the more you can be a pillar of strength for others. So when you protect yourself, you protect others. Keep that image of the acrobats in mind. When you maintain your balance, you’re much less likely to throw other people off their balance. And if they lose their balance, they can learn they can lean on you a little bit, because you know how to keep yourself protected. You carry this protection with you wherever you go.

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