Fortress Dhamma

September 16, 2010

As we practice the Dhamma, we’re developing treasures within. We invest time and energy in developing an inner wealth that’s the only really safe kind of wealth there is in the world. The qualities you develop in the mind provide you with all kinds of wealth. All kinds of protection when you’re facing aging, illness, death, separation. These qualities are skills that you need so that you don’t have to suffer from these things. And this is the most valuable wealth you can think of. Because when you’re sick, doctors can help you up to some point. And then they reach a point where they say, “Well, that’s as far as medicine can take you.” Same with aging, same with death. Having external wealth can help you to some extent, but there always comes a point where external wealth is no longer providing anything. And then you’re left to your own devices. So you want to work on developing what your own devices can do. So the fact that outside supports are falling away doesn’t have to disturb the mind. But you can take the skills you’ve developed in terms of mindfulness, alertness, concentration, and particularly discernment. Your discernment allows you to see the difference between the awareness that Satan knows pain and the actual pain itself. Or the distinction between the suffering that’s just there as part of having a body and the suffering that’s actually moving in on the mind. You want to be able to see that distinction. Because it turns out the suffering that’s moving in on the mind is the unnecessary part. It’s something that you actually create. This is really good news because it means that even though aging, illness, and death are inevitable, the suffering that comes from the suffering that has an effect on the mind is not inevitable. It’s optional, if you learn how to train the mind. And this kind of training is something no money can buy. This is why the time that’s invested in meditation is your best investment. Think about external wealth. It’s all part of what the Buddha calls worldly dhammas or worldly conditions. There’s eight altogether. There’s material gain, but then there’s material loss. There’s gain of status, good reputation, and then there’s a loss of that status and good reputation. There are people who will praise you. There are people who will criticize you. Then there’s pleasure and there’s pain. That’s pretty much what the world has to offer. And you notice these things come in pairs. You look at your material fortune, it goes up and it goes down. Your reputation in other people’s eyes goes up and down. Question whether people speak positive things about you or negative things about you. These things go up and down. And if you go up and down with them, you’re going to suffer. On the one hand, there is the exhilaration of the rise when things are going better, but then there’s the crash, the downcomes when they go worse. And it doesn’t really go anywhere. These things are totally outside of your control. There are cases when you can do absolutely wonderful things and people still criticize you for it. You put in a lot of good work, you’re responsible, and still your reputation can suffer. It’s all because of the complexities of karma, things you’ve done in the past. And there are times when you do horrible things and yet people will praise you. We see this all over the place. So if you pin your hopes on this kind of thing, you’re going to suffer. This is why the Buddha advises looking for wealth inside. He has a list of seven qualities. There’s conviction, virtue, a sense of shame, a sense of compunction. These four treasures protect you from doing things that you’re later going to regret. And that’s something of real value right there. Because when you do something you’ve regretted, there’s no amount of money that can erase that memory or wash it away. Which is why those four qualities right there are totally priceless. On top of that, the Buddha has in his list knowledge of the Dhamma, generosity, and then discernment. Discernment is the main quality here. It’s what enables you to see exactly what you’re doing that’s causing suffering and teaches you how to stop. It teaches you how to develop the qualities you need, that you can really depend on, and bring them to their full development. So the time and energy that’s spent developing these qualities is where you have a wealth that’s really safe. And once you have it, nobody can take it away. If you spend your time worried about your reputation, worried about what other people are saying about you, worried about something that’s not really yours to begin with and something that’s very easily taken away, then if you place your mind in that framework, you have to have other people’s good opinion. Only if you have other people’s good opinion can you feel good about yourself, can you feel happy. If you’re totally a slave to other people, then no matter how well you behave, you’re still a slave. And the masters can be totally arbitrary. So you don’t want to put yourself in that position. You’ve got to learn how to make the mind more solid so it can be impervious to those kinds of outside influences. And the only way it’s going to be impervious is if you have wealth inside. It’s like that point in Thai history when the Burmese came and surrounded Ayutthaya. And Ayutthaya held out for a long time because it had its own gardens inside, it had its own water supply, it had food, water, what people needed in order to survive the siege. Of course, on the material level, you do ultimately run out of food. And that’s one of the reasons why you use DFL. But on the internal level, the food and wealth that you provide for yourself doesn’t have to run out. Which means as long as you protect your inner valuables, have them as your food, have them as your clothing and shelter and medicine for the mind, then what other people say, what other people think, situations that happen outside, you don’t have to be affected by them. Because all the good things you need in life are right in here. So when the Buddha’s talking to Rahula about how to develop the kind of equanimity you need, there’s equanimity you need to start the practice, and there’s equanimity you develop along the way. It’s not just a matter of gritting your teeth. You have to learn how to have some resources. Resources inside that you realize you can depend on, so that when things go well, you don’t have to get too excited about it. When things go poorly, you don’t have to be affected. As you told Rahula, as his introduction to meditation, make your mind like earth. People throw disgusting things on earth, but the earth doesn’t react. Make your mind like water. People use water to wash away disgusting things, but that water doesn’t get affected. Fire can burn disgusting things. The wind can blow disgusting things, but they are not disgusted by that. Of course, the reason they can do that is because they don’t have to feed all of those things. In fact, the elements don’t have to feed at all. Now, the mind does have to feed in order to be able to develop that kind of non-reactive, impervious state of mind. You do have to abide by that. For the mind inside, the food, clothing, shelter you need, these are those treasures that the Buddha is talking about. These provide sustenance for the mind. That’s what we’re doing right here, right now. Developing the concentration, developing the insight. The Buddha compares the practice to having a fortress at the edge of a frontier. You’ve got conviction as your foundation post. The post that holds all the different parts of the fort together. You’ve got a moat encircling it. You’ve got a road encircling it. Those are shame and compunction. Those protect you from doing things you’re later going to regret. You’ve got your knowledge of the Dhamma as your weapons. You’ve got your persistence and energy. These are all the various kinds of soldiers you have. Mindfulness is a gatekeeper who knows who to let in and who not to let in, so that you can develop what’s skillful and what’s unskillful. Now you have mindfulness in the sense of keeping in mind the fact that you have to be very careful about what you do and say and think. Remember that every time you make a choice. Discernment is the high wall covered with plants. It’s your master that the enemy cannot climb. That’s your protection. And then you’ve got concentration as the food you need inside. Particularly your mindfulness and your energy and persistence require the food of the pleasure that comes from getting the mind concentrated. When you can develop these qualities, then you’re safe. You’ve got discernment as your protection. You’ve got concentration as your food. And those are basically the treasures you need. So regardless of what happens outside, who attacks, you don’t have to be affected by it. People can call you all kinds of names. Take your name and drag it through the mud. The economy can crash. Your body can get sick. As long as you’ve got these treasures, as long as you have these protectors inside, you have all you really need. So this is where you want to focus your energy, where you want to focus your attention. This is where you want to invest your time. So you don’t have to keep reacting to outside events. You know what’s happening. You’re ignorant of what’s happening. You know what’s happening, but you don’t have to get riled up about it, because you’ve got good things inside that nobody can take. Nobody even has to know about it. As Ajahn Lee once said, “Other people know about what your wealth is. It’s not safe.” And this is the safest kind of wealth. People don’t need to know about your concentration or your discernment. You’ve got them. And as long as you develop them, they’re yours. They’re your genuine wealth, which protects you here in this lifetime. And as the Buddha said, when you go on to the next life, all these treasures you’ve developed inside go with you. Or you can think of them as relatives on the other side. So your going to a new life is actually like coming home to a safe place. So these qualities protect you now, and they protect you in the future. This is why this is your wisest investment.

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