

## *Protection from Remorse*

*August 5, 2012*

Close your eyes. Focus on your breath.

Stay with the breath all the way in, all the way out. You can focus anywhere in the body where the breath is clear.

And allow the breath to be comfortable. Don't push it too much, don't squeeze it, don't drag it out too long or cut it short. Try to find the rhythm that feels just right for the body. Maybe the in-breath will be a little bit longer than the out-breath, or the out-breath should be a little bit longer than the in-breath—whatever feels good. And just stay right there. Protect this awareness. Don't let it get destroyed by other thoughts.

If other thoughts come in, just let them go. You don't have to go running after them. Because it's in running after them you drop your awareness of the breath. It's as if you're holding something good in your hands and someone comes running past and you drop what you have in your hands to go running after them. If it's food in your hands, then you lose your food. So look after this very carefully. Protect it.

This rains retreat has already started and for this rains retreat we're going to have a series of talks on the qualities that make for protection in your life. In fact it's through protecting yourself that you find protection in your life.

If you hope for other people or other beings to come and give you protection, they can't protect you against the effects of your own unskillful actions.

The only way you can protect yourself against that is not to do them to begin with. Then develop the mind really well so that in case there are any bad actions in your past, you won't be affected by them. In other words, the mind doesn't have to be overcome by pains or whatever that come from your past bad actions. So it all depends on *you* training your mind.

The Buddha gives a list of seven qualities that provide protection. The first one is virtue: following the precepts. Like the five precepts we chanted just now: no killing, no stealing, no illicit sex, no lying, no taking of intoxicants. When you avoid these five types of action, you're providing lots of good protection for yourself. On the one hand, if you don't go around killing others, they're not going to come and kill you. The same with stealing, illicit sex. As for lying, if you don't look after your own words, who's going to look after your own words? If you don't give them the value that you want to be careful to say only what's true, no one else is going to value your words at all. They'll always be suspicious about what you

have to say. As for taking intoxicants: We all know the damage that comes to people when they take intoxicants. So you make up your mind to see the damage that comes from these things.

If we lived in a society where everybody was killing and stealing and having illicit sex, what kind of society would it be? We see some of that around, but still we have some sense of values that these things are wrong. If we lived in a society where nobody saw these things as wrong, then we'd be in a lot of trouble. But if we're going to wait for society as a whole to get its act in order, it's going to be a long wait. Each of us has to start with ourselves. As we provide protection for ourselves, then it spreads out around us. Other people see a good example.

And as the Buddha said, when you take on these precepts, you see danger even in the slightest fault. In other words, even little things: You don't want to kill little things, or steal little things or lie just a little bit. You want to make sure that under no circumstances are you going to go against these precepts, because little things can turn in to big things very easily.

You might say, "Well, I've got a lot of good karma, I can do a little bit of wrong." Well, one, you're going to regret it for a long time, so you're protecting yourself from regret by not giving into these things. And two, if you do little things that are against the precepts, those little things can come back at you. Termites coming into your house don't require a very large hole to come into the house. Or to get malaria doesn't require a big mosquito. Just one tiny little mosquito can give you malaria if you're in the wrong place. And so on down the line.

There are lots of things that can kill you, lots of things that you can lose, starting out with just little tiny things. So you want to make sure there are no little gaps in your precepts. Make sure you've got your behavior all sealed up tight all around you as a kind of protection.

As the Buddha said, when you give protection to other people through the precepts, you're giving universal protection to the whole world. Then you're going to have a share in that universal protection as well. So it's a gift to yourself and a gift to others. And protection for yourself as you're protecting others.

So it's important that you learn how to look after your own mind. Because where do your actions come from, the actions that going to go against the precepts? The thoughts in your mind. This is why we have to meditate, or one of the reasons why we meditate, because all our actions come out of our minds. The mind needs to be trained. So as you stay with the breath you're training in mindfulness and alertness, the qualities that allow you to keep your precepts in mind and be alert to even the littlest things you might do doing against them.

So try to train your mind every day. The breath here is not exclusively Buddhist: Anybody from any tradition can focus on the breath and get the mind in a state of concentration. Then you begin to look at your own actions.

Because you're the one responsible for your actions, and you're the one who can protect yourself against the remorse that comes when you know you've done something wrong, by not doing it wrong to begin with. Or if you *have* done something wrong, then you make up your mind you're not going to do it again.

After all, the Buddha wasn't perfect from the very beginning. In his many, many lifetimes of pursuing awakening, he made lots of mistakes. So he knows what it's like to make a mistake and to feel the remorse and the regret that comes afterwards, which is why he counsels us not to do wrong things, not to go against the precepts. This is one of the ways you can protect yourself from the remorse and the dangers that come when you act carelessly.

So always be careful in what you do and say and think. Be careful to train the mind so that your actions are in line with the precepts, and you find that you give yourself a really important protection that no one else can give you.