

The Skills of Seclusion

January 13, 2018

We've come to the monastery to find some seclusion, to get away from the germs of the world.—not just the physical germs, but also the mental germs. We have some time to get some physical seclusion, but we also want some mental seclusion. Physical seclusion means that you're just away from other people or at least not involved. Like right now as you're sitting here: Even though you are surrounded by people, everybody's quiet. Nobody's communicating. The problem, though, is mental seclusion. The mind is sitting there talking to itself. It's as if there are lots of people in here, lots of ideas, lots of opinions. You've got to learn how to put those aside, too.

As the Buddha said, when you go around with craving as your companion, there's no end to suffering. So one of the things you do is to give the mind a good craving right now: a craving to be still, a craving to be mindful, alert to the breath. Any other craving that comes right now, you've just got to put aside. That way, you begin to find the rest that you really need.

People who've been to the monastery for a while, when they go out into the rest of the world, complain about how there's an onslaught of all kind of things. A lot of the problem is that the mind is ready to pick up the onslaught. You have to learn how to step aside, avoid a lot of the energy coming right at you, and not suck it in. This is why you need to develop a skill, because when you leave the monastery—this “quiet corner” as Ajaan Suwat used to call it—you want to take a little bit of a quiet corner with you. You can't take the monastery, but you can take the skills you developed here.

When tension builds up in the body, learn how to breathe through it. When a thought comes up in the mind, learn how to just put it aside. The problem is that when thoughts outside are coming at you, they tend to get together with the thoughts inside and then they take on even more reality. So you have to be very careful about how you pick up things from outside.

One of the Buddha's recommendations is that when you hear unpleasant things, just make the comment, “An unpleasant sound has made contact at the ear.” And then just let it go. Don't elaborate on it any more than that. The skill in how not to pick up a thought and run with it, how to put it aside, is going to be really helpful in that process. If you see the mind beginning to elaborate, you say, “Wait a minute. The sound has ended, it's gone. Why are you still letting it echo in your mind?” Then go back to the breath. Breathe through things. That way, you have a skill to protect yourself.

Even when you leave this quiet corner, you've got a quiet corner to take with you inside the mind. You want to protect that. And then from that quiet corner, if you see that things need to be done outside, you're coming from a much better position. You're not coming from a

position of weakness or being victimized. You're coming from a position of safety and strength, which means you're a lot more likely to be able to realize what's the proper thing to do and say and think.

So learn the skills of the quiet corner. Then you can have a quiet corner wherever you go.