

# Protecting Oneself and Others Through Mindfulness

## The Acrobat Simile



## Topics

- 1) Comparative Study of Acrobat Simile**
- 2) Significance of Acrobat Simile
- 3) Discussion of other Similes
- 4) Relation to Mindfulness Practice

## Sources (Acrobat Simile)

- 1) *Sedaka-sutta*, SN 47.19 / SN V 168-169
- 2) *Samyukta-āgama* no. 619, Taisho II173b
- 3) *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Taisho XXIV 32b  
(*'dul ba*, Derge 1 *kha* 62a, Peking 1030 *ge* 57b)

*On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Sumbhas, where there was a town of the Sumbhas named Sedaka. There the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:*

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was dwelling among the Kosalans, in an Indian Rose-wood grove north of the town of Sedaka. At that time, the Blessed One said to the monks:

*"Monks, once in the past an acrobat set up his bamboo pole and addressed his apprentice Medakathālikā thus:*

*"In former times, there was a teacher of acrobatics done in dependence on a pole. He placed the pole straight up on his shoulder and told his disciple:*

*'Come, dear Medakathālikā, climb the bamboo pole and stand on my shoulders.'*

*Having replied, 'Yes, teacher', the apprentice Medakathālikā climbed up the bamboo pole and stood on the teacher's shoulders.*

*The acrobat then said to the apprentice Medakathālikā:*

*'You protect me, dear Medakathālikā, and I'll protect you. Thus guarded by one another, protected by one another, we will display our skills, collect our fee, and get down safely from the bamboo pole.'*

'Getting up and down on the pole, you protect me and I will also protect you. Protecting each other we will put on a show and gain much wealth.'

*When this was said, the apprentice Medakathālikā replied: 'That's not the way to do it, teacher!'*

Then the disciple of acrobatics said to the teacher of acrobatics: 'It won't do, as you said!'

*You protect yourself, teacher, and I'll protect myself. Thus, each self-guarded and self-protected, we will display our skills, collect our fee, and get down safely from the bamboo pole.'*

Instead, we should each take care to protect ourselves. [Like this] we will put on a show and gain much wealth. We will be physically at ease and yet I will get down safely.'

*That's the method there," the Blessed One said.  
"It's just as the apprentice Medakathālikā said to the teacher.*

The teacher of acrobatics said: 'As you said, we will take care to protect ourselves, this is correct and is also the meaning of what I said!'

*'I will protect myself,' monks, the establishments of mindfulness should be practiced.*

*'I will protect others', monks, the establishments of mindfulness should be practiced.*

*Protecting oneself, monks, one protects others; protecting others, one protects oneself.*

[The Buddha said]: "Having protected oneself, one right away protects the other; when protecting the other and oneself, this is protection indeed.

*And how is it, monks, that by protecting oneself one protects others? By pursuit, development, and cultivation. It is in such a way that by protecting oneself one protects others.*

[How does protecting oneself protect others]?  
Becoming familiar with one's own mind, developing it, protecting it accordingly and attaining realization — this is called 'protecting oneself protects others'.

*And how is it, monks, that by protecting others one protects oneself? By patience, harmlessness, loving kindness, and sympathy. It is in such a way that by protecting others one protects oneself.*

How does protecting others protect oneself? By the gift of fearlessness, the gift of non-violation, the gift of harmlessness, by having a mind of loving kindness and sympathy for the other — this is called 'protecting others protects oneself'.

*'I will protect myself,' monks, the establishments of mindfulness should be practiced. 'I will protect others', monks, the establishments of mindfulness should be practiced.*

*Protecting oneself, monks, one protects others; protecting others, one protects oneself. “*

For this reason, monks, you should train yourself like this: 'Protecting myself I will develop the four spheres of mindfulness, protecting others I will develop the four spheres of mindfulness.'

When the Buddha had spoken this discourse, the monks, who had heard what the Buddha had said, were delighted and received it respectfully.

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*That's the method there," the Blessed One said.  
"It's just as the apprentice Medakathālikā said  
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The teacher of acrobatics said: 'As you said, we will take care to protect ourselves, this is correct and is also the meaning of what I said'."

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## Mindfulness as a Protection

Mindfulness = One Factor to Protect the Mind,

Mindfulness = Careful Charioteer,

Mindfulness = Gatekeeper of a Town.

"Just as certain reflex movements automatically protect the body, similarly the mind needs spontaneous spiritual and moral self-protection. The practice of bare attention will provide this vital function".

"The non-violent procedure of bare attention endows the meditator with the light but sure touch so essential for handling the ... various difficult situations and obstacles met with in daily life."

"Self-protection will safeguard others, individuals and society, against our own unrestrained passions and selfish impulses ... they will be safe from our reckless greed for possessions and power, from our unrestrained lust and sensuality, from our envy and jealousy; safe from the disruptive consequences of our hate and enmity".

"If we ourselves think of nothing else than to crave and grasp ... then we may rouse or strengthen these possessive instincts in others ... our own conduct may induce others to join us in the common satisfaction of rapacious desires; or we may arouse in them feelings of resentment and competitiveness."

In the end, "greed and hate are, indeed, like contagious diseases. If we protect ourselves against these evil infections, we shall to some extent at least also protect others".

"He who earnestly devotes himself to moral self-improvement and spiritual self-development will be a strong and active force for good in the world."

### Acrobat Simile on Protecting Others

1) SN: Patience, Harmlessness

SA: Gift of Fearlessness, Gift of Non-violation,  
Gift of Harmlessness

2) SN & SA: Loving kindness &  
Sympathy/Empathy

"If we leave unresolved the actual or potential sources of social evil within ourselves, our external social activity will be either futile or markedly incomplete.

Therefore, if we are moved by a spirit of social responsibility, we must not shirk the hard task of moral and spiritual self-development.

Preoccupation with social activities must not be made an excuse or escape from the first duty, to tidy up one's own house first."

## Topics

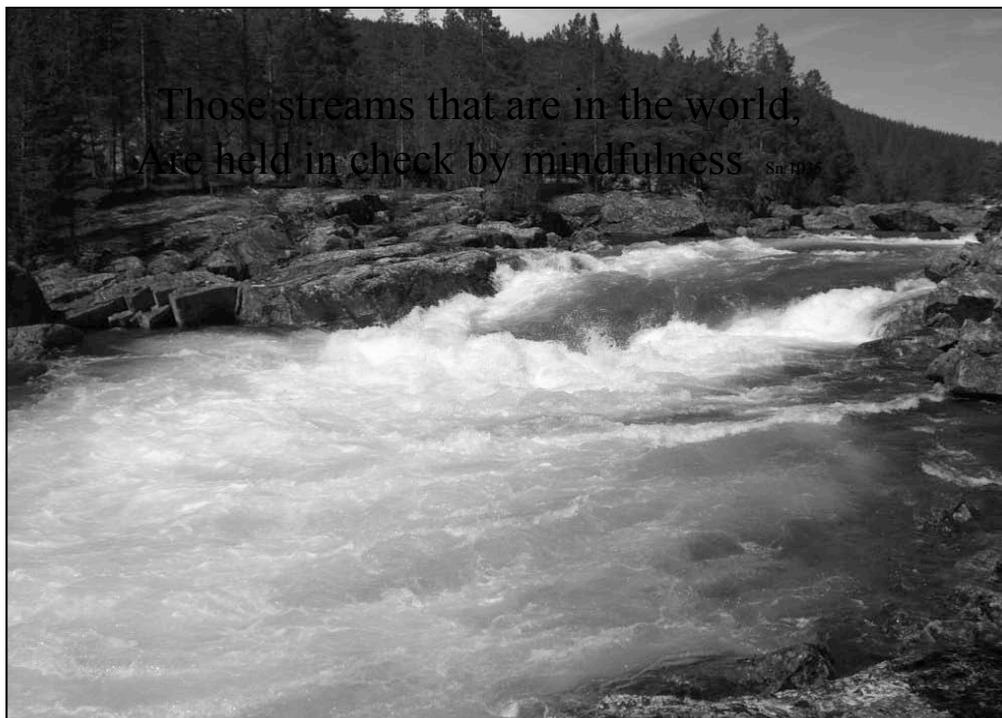
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*Satipaṭṭhāna*  
should be practised:

Internally = oneself

Externally = others

Internally-and-externally = both



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