

PERSPECTIVE
HOMAGE TO THE PROTECTIVE FORCES IN THE UNIVERSE
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Throughout my 15 years of Buddhist practice, I always wondered how the protective forces in the universe, or Buddhist gods, functioned to work for an individual. Sometimes I felt protected, in retrospect, at not receiving something I specifically chanted for: a relationship with a person who I later found out was selfish; a job I later found out was way too stressful; and a vacation I later found out was in a precipitous location.

Just lately, a specific experience with protective forces occurred over a period of three weeks. It began with me waking up in the middle of the night with the strongest sensation of being closed in, crushed. I quickly developed a fear of closed-in spaces, of being buried alive. The sensation increased to the point of it disturbing my waking hours. One evening, I had to leave the room while watching a television program with my family that portrayed a doctor rescuing a construction worker who was buried from an explosion. The sensation developed to the point of my being fearful to simply lay back for a moment of rest.

I tried settling myself, looking inward for some sort of cause: Was I taking on too much, causing myself to feel smothered somehow? Was I ignoring some sort of message? I've heard how disease and other symptomatic phenomena are related to emotion, to lessons needing to be learned or to some kind of imbalance in one's life. Over and over I searched for some kind of connection. But my life was generally well balanced. I wasn't taking on too much. I love my work, my home and my family. My relations on and off the job are joyful and sincere. I get sufficient rest and exercise, and I eat a well-balanced, healthy diet.

So what was going on? I decided to then remove myself a bit and omit any notion of some possible negative cause I was making or had made. For I tend to see anything in seemingly negative terms, in reference to something bad I may or may not have done. The moment I stopped thinking that way, the moment I cleared my inner vision of self-scrutiny, something strange happened: I had a strong sensation that I needed to get my car checked. I called my sister and asked her to schedule an appointment with my mechanic for the following Saturday I would be in Los Angeles to visit her; I had just moved to Los Angeles and didn't know of anyone reputable.

"The tires needed to be checked," I said, and it just felt like they needed to be inspected. My sister willingly obliged, although later she admitted that she thought I was being extravagant; I had taken my car in for its regular maintenance just a few months ago. She thought my car care was obsessive. I put in high performance oil and gas, take it in for its regularly scheduled maintenance, have it washed and waxed regularly, and have it detailed now and then.

That Saturday, my mechanic was booked solid and couldn't fit me in, so at the last minute I decided to make the trip down the following Saturday instead, when he could. That week, I drove back and forth from work as usual, living up in the mountains and working down in the city. The longer into the week, the stronger the sensation of fear I had.

The workweek ended, and at last I packed my car to make the trip south. Breezing down the highway with my dog Greta's ears flapping in the wind out the window, I normally feel so carefree and happy while heading out of town for the weekend. But this evening I was fearful and overly cautious of other drivers on the road.

The following morning, I brought my car in to my mechanic. After the inspection, he

showed me what was wrong. The tread on the front tires was completely worn on the inside of the wheels; metal was showing. The hose supplying the engine with coolant was ready to burst, and the mechanisms that support and monitor the timing belt were completely worn and in disrepair.

“You are one lucky lady,” he said. “I don’t know how these parts didn’t rupture. You could’ve been in a fatal accident, maybe even been crushed.”

I just stared at him, thinking of the last few SGI activities I did and the last few colleagues I had introduced to this Buddhism. I thought how strangely wonderful it was just to be alive, to look up at the sky and feel the sun beaming down. Everything appeared crystallized, sharper and brighter somehow. The fear of being closed in vanished, and from that evening on I slept fine.

After the weekend, I picked up my car and headed north for the workweek once again. I thought of the students I take care of in my position as a college counselor, most of them undecided, anxious or fearful. I thought of my doctoral studies in depth psychology, of my travels, projects and friends. Breezing down the highway, carefree in my sports car, with Greta’s ears flapping in the wind, I wondered about the protective forces in the universe and in my life and how we become aware of their workings. And I wondered at how often I’ve been protected unwittingly from danger, through my intuition, a sensation or environmental circumstance thereof.

As I live my life day to day as a member of the SGI-USA, I see more and more how through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that I am continually connecting myself with the universe and connecting my life with all the other bodhisattvas throughout time through the lifeblood of faith. Perhaps protective forces function as a response to my own growing wisdom, however minute, or in response to my own exertion in helping others understand their own seed of happiness and potential within. One thing that seems certain, however, is that the protective forces in the universe exist most definitely for whoever will listen and watch for their meanings, however strange or uncomfortable their mediums may be.