Faith, Wisdom and Doubt

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 57:00

Tonight I'd like to talk about faith, its relationship to wisdom, and the counterpoint quality of mind: doubt.

The word faith, for at least some of us, doesn't necessarily have positive connotations. Many of us already have a relationship with this word and what we understand it to mean. I know for myself, the meaning that I attached to faith was belief in something that was not provable. I looked up the dictionary definition this evening, and that is in fact one of the meanings: belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence. For myself, this kind of faith was not something I could resonate with or connect with, and so faith didn't seem to have a place in my life.

I'd like to explore what faith means in the context of our practice here, in the context of the Buddhist teachings. The word often translated as faith in the Pali is *saddha*, and I believe it was Carol or Sally who mentioned that the term literally translated means "to place one's heart upon." This is an interesting way to explore the meaning of faith. What is it that we place our heart with? To me, this evokes a connotation of trust. Other translations for *saddha* are confidence and conviction.

This quality of *saddha*—confidence, faith, conviction—is actually absolutely essential for our spiritual journey because it is from a place of conviction or confidence that we begin to actually engage.

To begin this exploration of faith, I'd like to start by talking about suffering. We all experience suffering. The term generally connotes some kind of larger sufferings, the major tragedies in our lives: a friend dying, a major relationship breakup, our own diagnosis of a serious illness. Or it may mean the suffering associated with large environmental disasters—this recent hurricane, for instance, the amount of damage it caused, tsunamis, earthquakes. We all experience this kind of suffering, although it is more rare for us.

More common is societal suffering, suffering that results from discrimination—of race, of gender, of age, of sexual preference. There is so much suffering in this world because of discrimination.

Yet the suffering referred to in the Buddhist teaching—the entire orientation that the Buddha had for his search—was: is there a way to relieve suffering? Suffering was his whole orientation. And the suffering he was interested in relieving wasn't just this deeper kind, but also the more subtle kinds that we experience all the time, throughout our day. We experience suffering because we don't like the kind of food that's out. We prefer brown rice to white rice, and there's maybe a little bit of irritation that our preferred food isn't available. Or maybe there's stress because of our work, or a particular encounter with a friend that didn't go the way we'd like, and it keeps niggling at us. So many different ways we experience stress and suffering, both in the large and the small. The Buddha was interested in all of these.

The term usually translated as suffering, *dukkha*, means much more than this broad or deep, massive kind of suffering. I think "suffering" doesn't really adequately translate the Pali word. Some translators have tried other translations. Stress is one that Thanissaro Bhikkhu uses. Other translations might be unreliability, unsatisfactoriness, unease, distress. Some of these words make it clear that *dukkha* means the whole range of this feeling that things just aren't the way we'd like them to be.

Most of the kinds of suffering I mentioned have something happening in the world around them. There's a hurricane and a lot of destruction, or there's the actual breakup of a relationship—something in the world happening, some given experience. The *dukkha* the Buddha was seeking to find an end to wasn't about finding a way the world could be free of natural disasters, because he knew that wasn't possible. Nor was it to be free of unpleasant experience—he knew that wasn't possible either. Rather, it was to be free of the mental reactivity to our unpleasant experience, to the natural disasters, to the tragedies of life. So that we can, with an open heart, meet our experience.

That open heart meeting experience, if it's meeting suffering, is going to have compassion as a response rather than anger or frustration or hatred or rage. That open heart meeting beautiful experience is going to have joy as a response rather than greediness and wanting. This is what he was pointing to: this reactivity of the mind.

This reactivity is the dukkha the Buddha was pointing to.

We all have our own familiar strategies for dealing with our struggles. One common approach is thinking that the way to relieve this distress is to fix the thing in the world that's a problem—or that we perceive as a problem. We try to get rid of what we don't like and keep what we do like, this continual sense of arranging things so they align with what we'd prefer. And if this doesn't succeed, we may escape into sense pleasure. That's another strategy for working with things not being to our liking.

When we first meet our suffering—before we really encounter a spiritual path—we think it doesn't get much better than arranging the world. This arrangement works for a little while. Perhaps we can arrange things so they suit us, and then we have a sense of happiness: "Oh, okay, I can relax. Things are just the way I'd like them to be." But the law of impermanence takes hold and things change. So we have to rearrange again. We keep trying this—rearranging and it breaks down, rearranging and it breaks down. Ultimately we know this doesn't quite work.

I want to add something here, because often when hearing this exploration of suffering—this notion that fixing things doesn't ultimately lead to peace—people think it means we shouldn't make any effort to change things. It's a little paradoxical, perhaps. If there's injustice in the world, if you see that because of discrimination there is suffering, the Buddha suggests we act to alleviate that suffering. But the intention behind that action is not reactivity, aversion, hatred, rage, or hostility—rather, it's compassion. We can act in the world. The Buddha suggests we choose to act out of compassion rather than reactivity. I want to put that out there because often there's a misunderstanding that this teaching means we're not supposed to

try to fix or change anything. That's not what he's saying.

So we meet this suffering in our lives, and some of us begin our spiritual journey through an encounter with suffering. The Buddha said that an encounter with suffering will lead either to bewilderment or to search. When it leads to search, the question is something like: "Does anyone know a way out of this suffering?"

I know for myself, this is how I encountered my own spiritual journey—descending into a place of such deep suffering that I simply could not find a way out. It was just this sense of: "Does anyone know how to deal with this?"

If in that space of search we actually encounter a teaching that speaks to a way out of suffering, we may begin to sense a possibility that there's a direction that might help. This is the beginning, the initial stirring of faith. Hearing that someone has found a way can bring in a little bit of hope—"Oh, maybe there's something there." It brings a willingness to connect with that teaching. This is just the very beginning of faith, the beginning of willingness to listen.

In the context of our practice here, on this retreat and in our Buddhist spiritual journey, this faith, this confidence, is intimately connected with wisdom—the wisdom in particular of the Four Noble Truths. And here we are back at suffering. The Four Noble Truths: the truth of suffering; the truth that suffering has a cause, that it's not random but caused by this essentially rebelling and reacting against things as they are, wanting things to be other than they are; the truth of the possibility for the cessation of suffering; and the truth of the path leading to that cessation—the Eightfold Path. This is what we're practicing here.

Faith with respect to these teachings, this wisdom the Buddha discovered on the night of his awakening, doesn't mean simply believing them. Not putting them up on a pedestal or reading them in a book and saying, "Yes, I believe the First Noble Truth. I believe that wanting is the cause of suffering. I believe there's a path that leads to the end of suffering." It doesn't do us much good to simply hold a sense of belief in these. The Buddha suggested that we need to act on these truths. Faith in our practice isn't about simply believing—it's about the willingness to act, the willingness to engage.

So the actions the Buddha suggested with each truth: we need to understand suffering. This understanding is a turning towards our experience.

This isn't an intellectual exercise. You all know this. It's the turning towards our experience. What is this suffering? What is this experience?

Understanding suffering in this way helps us to see how suffering is put together, the cause of suffering. The understanding of suffering begins to allow us to actually see how the cause is connected, how this wanting is connected to the suffering.

And then we begin to see the second action that the Buddha suggested would be really helpful: let go of

the cause of suffering. Let go of the wanting. If you let go of the wanting, the suffering will not arise.

Even just a thought experiment along these lines. If you have a sense that there's a problem in your life, if there were no reactivity to that external situation, no wanting it to be different, would it be a problem? When the wanting goes away, the suffering goes away.

The third noble truth, the task, the action, is to realize the cessation of suffering—realize that it's possible, realize the actuality that suffering can come to an end. And the fourth noble truth is to cultivate or develop the path, to develop the qualities of heart and mind that support our being able to understand suffering and to let go of the cause of suffering, which allows us to realize this release from suffering.

The faith that we begin to have comes in stages, in a way. We may see that there are people who have practiced. For myself, I heard from a friend, "Wow, I found this really helpful." And that brought in a little bit of a sense of, well, maybe I would find it helpful too. We take inspiration and we borrow faith, in a sense, from other people at the beginning.

So we begin with this faith in the possibility of freedom from suffering and a little bit of a sense of faith that there might be a path, that there might be some practices that would help us. And some faith in those who have followed the path and realized some benefits and are able to express that: "Yes, this has been really helpful for me." These three—faith in the possibility, faith in the practices, faith in the people who have practiced it—this is faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, our three refuges.

For me, the way faith has expressed itself in my own practice is kind of more like a scientific hypothesis. The Buddha suggested, here are these truths, here are actions associated with these truths. If you follow these actions, you'll experience some results. It sounds remarkably like a hypothesis, a scientific hypothesis. And so we can understand this as, well, let's run the experiment. Our minds and bodies are laboratories. Let's run the experiment of using mindfulness to understand the suffering and see what happens.

We examine the teachings in our own experience. We turn towards our suffering using the teachings, the practices, and mindfulness to explore our experience. And in this way we may start to see some benefits for ourselves. We may start to recognize the power of these teachings for ourselves.

This is a kind of transition for us in terms of faith. Initially we have to borrow faith from others, talking to people about how they have connected with the practices and what benefits they've received. We can read them and reflect on them and think whether they make sense or not. But it's not until we start engaging that we begin to taste for ourselves the truth of these teachings. And they are verifiable for ourselves. In this way, the faith in this practice doesn't have that same quality of faith in something or belief in something that is not verifiable. We can practice ourselves and verify for ourselves that these teachings are effective.

In my own practice, I'll tell you how this unfolded for me in the first months. I'm very skeptical, very

scientifically oriented, a scientific kind of mind. But I was in deep, deep suffering. And I had tried everything that I could think of. It was very much like what the Buddha said: does anybody know a way out of this? I have tried everything that I can think of.

I talked to a friend who had been doing this practice and she said, "Well, this has been helpful for me. Why don't I send you a book?" And so she sent me a book and I began reading it. One of the key little bits—I didn't understand much from this book, but the wisdom of the Buddha is actually pretty dense.

And so even a tiny little bit of that wisdom, if you can just get a tiny little bit of that wisdom and start to act on it, it's pretty potent.

In reading through this book, which was *Everyday Zen* by Joko Beck, one of the things I pulled out was: try observing your emotions rather than acting on them. Strong anger was my main issue at that time. It was pretty much making me non-functional. I would find myself in a rage, frozen at my computer, oblivious to everything around me, lost in my mind in fury. I was pretty non-functional at times.

So this teaching—observe it—I thought, well, what good is that going to do? I had no idea how that would be helpful. And I had no training at that point in mindfulness whatsoever. Nobody to tell me: pay attention in your body, let go of the thoughts. I didn't have any of those instructions. But I thought, okay, it doesn't make any sense to me, but nothing else I've tried has seemed to work. So I'll see what happens if I try observing my anger.

I tried this. I remember the first time I noticed the anger and remembered that I was going to observe it. I had said to myself, I'm going to do this, I'm going to try to pay attention to my anger when it happens. And the first time I noticed and remembered, my thought was, wow, yeah, I'm angry. What do I do with this? This feels really unpleasant. I had no idea what to do with it. But in that moment, I thought, I don't know what I do. I guess I go back to work.

In retrospect, I realized that recognition of the anger, that moment, actually broke into the anger and allowed me to go back to work instead of being frozen in rage. There was a little bit of space around that anger. And over time, over the course of months of doing this practice, I began to see more and more space around my anger.

So the faith, the confidence in that teaching—I was getting some verification. It was definitely heading me in the right direction. I knew, at least I'm not quite so strung out here. I can function more. I could see that even just recognizing, yep, I'm angry, was really helpful.

And that helpfulness encouraged me to keep trying, keep practicing, keep exploring my anger. Then one day I was in the kitchen cutting an apple. I wasn't trying to be mindful, I was just present. I noticed as I was cutting this apple that a thought appeared in my mind about the person I was angry with. And in seeing that thought, I could see in that moment that there was this impulse to jump on that thought and think more thoughts in order to get angry. I could see that direction. I was heading in that direction.

And in seeing that—having spent a lot of time paying attention to anger, noticing how really unpleasant it is—the mind in that moment saw that it was headed towards really unpleasant experience, and it let go. It just let go. I didn't even have to do it. The mind did it by itself.

I stood there in the kitchen waiting to get angry, because I hadn't had the experience of this person coming up in my mind without anger also arising. But I did not get angry.

I was so blown away. I thought, oh my God, this stuff is so powerful. That moment—when I look at it now—that was a seminal moment in my practice. Looking back on it, it was an understanding of the Four Noble Truths in that moment. I saw how the suffering was created by that movement towards wanting to turn myself up. And I saw that the mind could let go of that. I understood deeply the suffering of that reactivity.

I saw how the letting go happened. I realized the freedom there. I could directly witness—I directly saw—that had I not been doing that practice, this practice of observing, I would have been spun out in anger again. I saw the non-arising of anger, saw that anger did not arise. And I directly saw that the development of those qualities I'd been practicing for the past few months had led me to this place.

This was a moment of complete, deep confidence in the teaching. And that was really the moment that my—I feel like looking back on it, that's the moment I got on this path. That was the moment of deep verified faith. I knew for myself the benefit of these teachings.

I know you all have times in your practice where you have experienced something similar. It helps actually, at times, to recall these insights, these times when our faith is verified. This supports the reminder of the benefits of this practice—to remember how it supports you, how it has helped you in your life. We can do this to help cultivate this quality of confidence, of faith.

The practice of engaging with these teachings leads us to actually verifying for ourselves the truth of these teachings, which gives us a taste of the wisdom for ourselves and leads us to greater confidence in the teachings—which then cycles through. Greater confidence leads to more interest in engaging with the teachings, which leads us to deeper understanding of the teachings, which leads us to deeper faith. These two qualities support each other and encourage each other: the faith and the wisdom.

And yet the practice isn't one continuing deepening of faith and wisdom. We get caught. We especially, I think, can get caught around the gradual nature of the unfolding of this practice. I think we're a culture of instant gratification. We want the results quickly.

When we've had an insight, a recognition into a pattern, into a particular struggle that we've worked with, and we see, "Oh, this is how it's happening!"—and it falls apart in a moment like that—sometimes we can have the thought, the belief, "Oh, I understand now. That's not going to happen again." And yet the pattern returns again and again and again.

In seeing that, we can think, "I've seen through this before. What's my problem here?" We can feel like we must be doing something wrong if we can't see through it a second time, or a third time, or the fifth or eighth time it comes up again. Doubt comes in. Or maybe we figure, "Well, I must not have really seen through that in the first place." Or we figure, "Well, maybe it really didn't work. It never really happened. The practice didn't really work at all."

This is doubt. The Buddha described doubt—or he compared doubt, he gave a simile about doubt—as being like being lost in the wilderness. In particular, he described it as being lost in a desert. Imagine a desert. There's very little in the way of landmarks in a desert. You take a few steps this way, you think, "That must be the wrong way, better go back." You take a few steps that way—"Oh, that can't be the right way." So there's this wavering quality, a sense of not really being able to commit to any direction at all.

This is how the Buddha described doubt. When we're caught in doubt, we come to a kind of standstill in our practice. We might try something for a few moments and then think, "Ah, this isn't working," or "There's another practice I should do." So we don't ever commit. We don't commit when we're caught in this state of doubt.

There are so many things we can have doubts about. And I think it's helpful to actually name some of these things, because in my own experience, the different things that we doubt—there are also different ways to work with the doubt that comes up, depending on the kind of doubt it is.

So there's doubt in the teachings. The Buddha taught 2,500, 2,600 years ago. No such thing as iPods, iPhones, Macs,

cars, 52-story buildings that planes fly into. There was just a much simpler life. What could he have possibly had to say that would relate to us here and now?

There are doubts we can have in the teachers. What do these teachers know? I know that there are much better teachers in Burma, so maybe I should plan to go to Burma.

We doubt ourselves. We doubt our ability, our capacity. We doubt the possibility that we can do this. This, I think, is probably one of the key ways we get caught. We seem to have the sense that everybody else can do it but me.

We doubt the practice itself. What does paying attention to the in-breath and out-breath have to do with anything? Or we can get stuck wavering about what practice to do. Should I pay attention to my breath? Should I do some metta? Should I directly face this difficult state? Oh, maybe I should try metta. No, no, let me try paying attention. No. So we waver. It's just like being lost in the desert.

The most important thing with doubt is actually to recognize that it's happening—to notice that doubt has come into our minds and has us locked into this wavering state. It has that feeling of, "What should I do?" In my experience, this recognition of doubt is the most important piece. Once we can recognize that doubt

is happening, we have a kind of toe in the door to begin to help it release. Doubt really feeds on us not being aware of it. But when we become aware of it, something shifts.

I find that doubt is often experienced as a lot of thinking. So it can be helpful to get familiar with the ways in which your doubt manifests, what kinds of thoughts it takes shape as. In my own experience, I've found that if I find myself thinking about the practice—thinking about what kind of practice I should do, how this practice works, whether this practice even works—thoughts about the practice rather than doing the practice, it's worth checking in to see if doubt is present.

This kind of thinking can often be hooked into our logical, rational mind. And so it can fool us. Doubt has this incredible capacity for masquerade. It puts on this costume of reason: "I shouldn't be doing this practice. This practice obviously doesn't work for me." It can hook into our rationality, and we have a lot of trust in our thinking mind in this culture. Doubt brings that in and fools us into thinking that it's actually a rational, reasonable thought. So it can be really helpful to just begin to notice: when we are thinking about the practice, is there doubt present?

As I said a few minutes ago, I think there are different ways to work with doubt depending on the kind of doubt. If there are doubts in the teachings, the teachers, or the practice, I often find it helpful to reflect that the whole nature of this Dharma is that the Buddha said, "Come and see. Try it for yourself." He didn't say, "Believe me." He said, "Come and see." And so I come back to that sense of a scientific hypothesis for myself. The Buddha didn't ask me to believe this, but can I run the experiment? Here's a teaching. Can I run the experiment on my mind and body? Why don't I try the practice and see what happens?

With certain kinds of doubt—if there's a lot of confusion about a teaching, if you're not clear about a teaching and your mind is wavering about how you can work with this if you don't understand it—that kind of doubt, it's usually helpful to go talk to a teacher. Ask a question. Help to clarify your understanding.

Sometimes doubt can be covering up some other emotion. So it can be helpful to check in when you notice doubt. You've noticed, okay, there is doubt here.

What does it feel like? What does doubt feel like? When I've done this, when I've explored, it's like, "Oh, grief. There's grief here." That's what doubt feels like. I was caught for two hours one afternoon at Spirit Rock on a long retreat, just completely struggling with doubt. And when I finally recognized it—"Oh, doubt is present. I guess doubt is what I need to practice with. What does doubt feel like?"—I just felt so much grief. I could be with the grief. And in being with the grief, there was no doubt.

So it can be helpful to check in. The question "What does doubt feel like?" can sometimes open us to something underneath: a fear, an uncertainty, some other emotion, depression perhaps.

On one retreat, I felt like there was a lot of doubt. It was an early retreat—I think it was my second retreat. So I decided I would ask a question in the hall during the question and answer period. I was sitting there

trying to frame my question in my mind about doubt. I heard in my mind the question being framed, and the first few words of every question started with "I'm afraid that..." When I heard this five or six times, I began to think, maybe this isn't doubt. Maybe this is fear.

I never even got a chance to ask my question, but I started just noticing that actually fear was everywhere, that the doubt had been kind of masking this fear. Somebody would walk up next to me and I'd feel this fear. The fear was quite predominant; it was there a lot. And I could be with it. It wasn't an overwhelming fear, but it was just that it had been hidden from me by this doubt.

If the doubt is about what kind of practice to do—"Should I do this or should I do that? Maybe I should do this. No, I should do that"—just pick one. It really doesn't matter that much. You can pick one, explore it, see what happens, run the experiment.

The antidote to doubt, the main antidote to doubt, is connecting with experience. When we are lost in doubt, we have gotten disconnected from experience. We are completely in a world of our thoughts, of our projections, of our ideas. We're not, as Joseph says, even in the vicinity of our experience when we're lost in doubt. And so if we can simply connect with experience, this question—"What does doubt feel like?"—begins to connect us again with experience. When we connect with experience, doubt actually doesn't stand much of a chance.

Sometimes we might listen to the voice of doubt and then apply a little bit of a teaching, and then listen to the voice of doubt and apply a little bit of the teaching. That's kind of like putting the kettle on and off the stove. We just need to connect with our experience. Sustaining the attention counters that wavering mind of doubt.

One of our ways that doubt comes up for us is through belief, through views. We think, "Well, since I'm experiencing some mind state—take your pick: fear, anxiety, dread, lust, boredom—since I'm experiencing this, I must not be doing the practice right." Again, the sense that the practice isn't working because we're experiencing something. Actually, what's in the way there is the belief that the practice isn't working. Can you just connect with boredom? Can you connect with fear, anxiety, worry, depression, lust? In that very connection is the antidote to doubt.

Another thing that supported me in my practice around doubt is to take refuge. This kind of emerged spontaneously—it can emerge spontaneously. On one retreat, I was really feeling like I just couldn't be mindful. Every time I'd try to be mindful, I couldn't be very mindful.

My mind was just all over the place, and I was wavering back and forth. "Oh, I'm such a horrible yogi. I can't be mindful at all. This practice doesn't work." And then I'd take a step and feel my foot on the ground. "I'm a good yogi! I can feel my foot on the ground." And then my mind would be all over the place again. "I can't pay attention."

At some point I realized that when I could take a step and feel the foot on the ground, that wasn't me doing

that. It was simply the capacity of the mind that can be aware. And that, for me, is how I understand the refuge in the Buddha. The refuge in the Buddha, for me, is the refuge in our capacity for awakeness. And there it was, just all by itself—awareness appearing in a footstep. I thought, "Wow, okay, I'll just take refuge in that capacity. I can take refuge in the Buddha."

It gave me a great feeling of ease around my struggles with my mind. It was so clear I couldn't control my mind. But every now and then there would be this awareness that was very clear.

We can also take refuge in the Dharma, the refuge in the practice itself. Just sit and walk. One teacher suggested to a student to put a sign in their room: "When in doubt, follow the schedule." Just sit and walk. The practice will unfold if you simply continue. I think James mentioned that Bhikkhu Bodhi said there are two things: we must start, and we must continue. Just continue the practice.

Another support for countering doubt is to cultivate faith—to cultivate the quality of confidence. There are a few ways to do this. I mentioned one earlier: reflecting on ways that your practice has supported you. If you find yourself in a hindrance attack of doubt, it can be helpful to remind yourself that it hasn't always been like this, that you have actually had times when you've directly known for yourself the value of this practice. There's not one of you who hasn't experienced this. There's no way you would be coming on a retreat of this length if you didn't have some of that confidence, some of that verified experience. So recall those times when your faith has been verified. This is very helpful to reflect on. It supports our faith, our confidence, our trust in the practice.

Also recognize when confidence is actually present. At times when the practice is unfolding and you have a sense of engagement and connection with your experience, sometimes there can be a sense of confidence there. Acknowledge that. Actually recognize that quality. Mindfulness has this capacity: when we are mindful of beautiful qualities of mind, like confidence, it increases their tendency to occur in the future. And when we bring our mindfulness to the hindrances, it decreases their likelihood of occurring in the future. So mindfulness has this great property—it supports the beautiful qualities and allows us to let go of the unwholesome qualities. Actually recognizing, being mindful of the quality of confidence, will support it to arise more frequently.

Likewise, another support for confidence is to recognize when other beautiful qualities arise. Guy talked about this in the guided meditation this morning—recognize when mindfulness arises. Notice it. There's a host of beautiful mind states that come as we practice. And sometimes as we're practicing, we become so focused on the suffering.

We're looking at our aversion, we're looking at the pain in our leg and the aversion to it. And we're not quite so aware that while we're actually being mindful of that, mindfulness is being cultivated and patience is being cultivated.

I remember on one long retreat, I had an incredible kind of clamping down around my heart, and it felt

like there was very little I could do to be mindful of anything else. So I could just walk back and forth and feel this incredible pain in my heart. But in that walking back and forth, I said, "Well, at least I'm cultivating patience." Recognizing that strengthens the quality.

So recognizing these beautiful qualities—recognizing mindfulness, interest, joy, calm, equanimity, kindness, concentration, truthfulness, patience, compassion—beautiful qualities arise for us as we practice. As we recognize them, this cultivates the soil for faith, which undermines the soil that doubt can grow in.

So really, our practice, our faith related to this wisdom, we keep coming back to suffering. We can use an exploration of suffering as understanding suffering. This is our practice; this is what we're doing here. We can use suffering as a guide.

Confidence in this teaching of the Four Noble Truths gives us a sense that when we're experiencing suffering, it's not a mistake. It's actually the direction that we can meet. If we can meet that suffering, it's the direction for our freedom.

There's sometimes a teaching that we get the lessons that we need. That's kind of a new age teaching—we get the lessons we need. It's not that the world out there, the universe, is conspiring somehow to create the situations that will give us the lessons we need. It's our own minds that are struggling against situations. The lessons that we need are created because we struggle against things as they are.

So meeting our suffering is the very point, the very doorway through which our freedom can be found. All it takes is the willingness to do it.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.