Spiritual Faculties and Factors of Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 46:02

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Yesterday we did the hindrances, how to deal with those states of mind which take us away from the object. Even though they're called hindrances they are our teachers, aren't they? Because they're there to tell us what's wrong with us and through our instructions we can deal with them in a skillful way. So we have to look upon them as welcome enemies something like that. We have to open our hearts to our hindrances.

Now there's the other side of the equation which is the seven factors of enlightenment and the five spiritual faculties. And I'm going to try and dovetail them and by the end of the talk you'll be utterly confused. But I'll try and reduce it to a very simple statement at the end and the best thing is, especially for those who don't know what I'm talking about, is to let it go in one ear and out the other. Because it's more in the sense of giving a certain confidence and a certain background knowledge which gives you faith, confidence in the process.

And the ground of spiritual practice in terms of advancement is faith. I was going to say *sīla*, right conduct. Well of course we always talk about *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. So *paññā* is the wisdom factor and *sīla* refers to the conduct and the one must be mirrored in the other. But here we're talking more specifically about developing this quality of intuitive insight.

So faith is crucial and the first thing is not to confuse that with belief. So if we define belief as faith in a statement such as "I believe in a god" or "I don't believe in a god" then that's not what the Buddha is talking about when he talks about *saddhā*, faith. What he's talking about is a sense of confidence, a sense of trust.

And if you think about it, anytime you act, especially those times during our lives when it's a big decision, such as moving house or getting a job elsewhere or forming a relationship or going to live with somebody, marry them. All those sorts of relationships, all those sorts of occasions demand faith. That you trust. You trust in your own decision, you trust in the way that you see things, that you understand things. And that there's something in the heart which is telling you that this is what you have to do. Otherwise, you just wouldn't do it.

So you can see that the relationship between trust and commitment is crucial. If you don't trust, you just

don't do it. If you go to a surgeon to have the pimple removed at the end of your nose, and you don't feel right about him or her, then you don't do it. You go and find somebody else.

So that faith has two qualities. It has the qualities of understanding and the quality of trust which comes more from the heart. So this understanding is got merely by listening to Dharma talk, reading. That's the first sort of understanding we have. It's a given and it makes sense. The deeper understanding comes when that becomes our own way, that we've worked it out for ourselves.

So you might hear somebody for instance explain the wheel of dependent origination, this psychology the Buddha taught, and it might initially make sense, but then when you reflect on it, it may begin to make more sense, and you can see that with that more sense there grows that sense of trust, that coming from the heart, that willingness to investigate further.

And of course through the practice of *vipassanā*, what was an intellectual understanding then becomes a direct understanding, and that of course begins to cement the faith, begins to cement it. And it is said that faith doesn't become unshakeable until we've intuited *Nibbāna*. So once a person has experienced *Nibbāna* then there's no way that that faith can be shaken because now they know for themselves absolutely the teaching of the Buddha is true. So it's not a matter then of losing faith anymore. In fact the Buddha gives it a different word.

For one word it's called an *indriya*, which is a faculty, and when somebody has an insight into *Nibbāna* it becomes a *bāla*, it becomes a strength, unshakable. And the quality of that understanding, the process, is really just that deepening of understanding, and it has this effect of trust.

Now that trust is coming from the heart, isn't it? It's something slightly more intuitive. So there are those people who need to understand the nth degree of the teaching before they dare to trust it. These are heavy thinkers. And there are those people who don't need much understanding, they just trust the feeling they have towards a particular teaching or towards a particular teacher. And that's enough for them, you see, that feeling of an intuitive feeling that this is right for them. Most of us of course have to balance the two of them in some sort of proportion.

But you can understand that there are some people who just have faith. They just have faith. And you can diminish it by calling it blind faith because they can't draw up the arguments. But it can be just as deeply felt, just as deeply committed as the faith of somebody who can argue their point. And it was often a criticism that somebody had blind faith. But if your blind faith is actually in the truth, that's good, isn't it? I mean, if it actually turns out that what you've got a blind faith in is the absolute truth, it saves you a lot of reading for a start. I mean, you just get on with the practice.

So this movement of the heart towards faith, you see, is there at the beginning of our practice, and it supports everything that we're doing. And there's a lovely image given. I can't remember whether it came from the scriptures, but definitely it's in the *Milindapañha*. So the *Milindapañha* were questions and

answers given by Nāgasena, who was understood to be fully awakened.

Some centuries after the Buddha when all the north part of that world was all Greek because Alexander had conquered it so *Milinda* is actually the Greek king Menander who would have been around Afghanistan and there he talks about the water purifying gem of the world conquering monarch.

In the scriptures you get this myth of the world conquering monarch. Those of you who know the story of the Buddha, when he was seen by the wise man, he prophesied that this little baby would become either a world conquering monarch or a fully self-enlightened being. And that's what made his father all upset and made sure that he brought him up to be a world conquering monarch. That's the story.

So this alter ego runs right through the scriptures that the Buddha could have become this and if he had he would have been this superb leader of the world bringing tremendous good conduct and all that. So, one of the gems that the person has, one of the things that they have to support that world-conquering manifestation is this water-purifying gem. So that when all the horses and the camels and the bullock carts have passed over the river with all the men carrying their shields and swords, of course the water is all disturbed, but by dropping this lovely gem into the water, the whole thing just becomes utterly purified.

And that's a lovely image for faith. Because remember, if you think about it, before you make a decision, there's confusion, isn't there? There's a sense of confusion. Shall I? Shall I not? There's lots of doubt about. You don't know whether you will or whether you won't. You make your lists for and against. And then suddenly you commit and the whole thing just disappears. Just like that. And the heart with all its troubles and its anxieties just gets completely purified. It just all vanishes and suddenly there's this lovely blossoming of joy in one's commitment. So it's a lovely image to have that faith.

Now, that faith underpins this *paññā*, and *paññā* is this intuitive intelligence. So it's because we have confidence in this teaching, we have confidence in the practice, that we actually can even start looking. And that looking, that observing, brings about its own insights, which then strengthens the faith. And so they tumble over each other into pure awakening.

Now that intuitive intelligence is expressed in the other form, the seven factors of enlightenment, as investigation of dharma, *dhammavicaya*. And when the Buddha is talking about that, remember, if you read the discourse on it, it's basically beginning to look at things the way he saw things. So we have those three characteristics, transience, not self, and how we create unsatisfactions for ourselves. But also this business of deconstructing things, all this business around the hindrances, and also all this business around the factors of enlightenment. So that's all to do with investigating the Dharma as he taught it.

That Dharma is supported, that investigation is supported by equanimity. Equanimity is one of these funny words really. It's not the same as calmness. Equanimity I think is best described as a perfect receptivity. Now, there's nothing stopping you from receiving. There's no reaction to what's actually

coming at you. So, if you liken it to a judge, we expect the judge not to get caught up in the funny little arguments of these lawyers. See, at the head level. And we don't expect them to get caught up in the anger and emotion of the crowd, baying for blood.

So it's that business of being able to be dispassionate not caught up in and of course as soon as we lift ourselves into the position of the observer it arises naturally because to observe you have to allow whatever is to be observed to manifest and we lose that sense of equanimity as soon as we dropped into any reaction, wanting, not wanting.

So that equanimity has to be there for the investigation to be clear. And for the investigation to be clear, the intelligence must be awakened, and we won't do that unless we have faith in the process.

Now supporting that you've got concentration which is balanced with effort with proper energy. Concentration again is one of those funny things because normally when you say to somebody, you know, get concentrated or be focused, you expect this real narrowing down, collapse into some sort of tightness, you know. But concentration in this sense just means being able to keep the attention on the object full stop. And the effort which is to be developed is just the effort needed to keep the attention on the object.

So if that concentration becomes tight, then you start moving into restlessness. It begins to shake, you see, and you can't keep your mind on it. And when that happens, the meditator has to recognize that, you see. So the restlessness, and this is where the meditation gets, shall we say, a little tricky, because you may be thinking that the restlessness is coming from something arising out of the heart or something, but actually it might be to do because you're trying too hard. Trying to become too concentrated.

So that business of effort and concentration, if you think of a camera, when you focus it, you know the old ones, before they made these little machines, where you had to actually use your fingers. And if you think of that, you see that's the effort, and then there's the focus, you see.

Now the other side of concentration, when you have too much concentration but not enough energy, is that of course the mind now is like a laser beam, it's facing one way. And if the energy is not there to support it, then you drop into a state of unconsciousness. That's not the same as sleep and you'll know the meditator knows when that's happened rather than sleep because the body remains upright because the energy is there alright the concentration is there but because the energy is not supporting it then it's as though the mind just stops as a blank and you wake up.

However depending on the power of that concentration it can last for various lengths of time. There's a lovely story about a Hindu guru who was an adept at these very high jhānic absorption states and he gave an instruction to his attendant to get him some water and went to meditate and he went into one of these states. Ten years later, he comes out of this state and his first words are, "Where's my water?"

And what the tale is meant to symbolize is that nothing happens. It's a complete waste of time getting into these blank states. And it's funny how many people actually believe that meditation is about blanking the

mind, about turning it off and ending up in this dead place.

So when that happens we can congratulate ourselves because the concentration is good but then we have to also recognize that the effort, there's something wrong with the effort. And normally when you look at it there's been a moment there where you've lost interest where something has lost its empowering of that looking and the whole thing drops.

When the concentration has become too tight then you have to look at your effort. So the effort to gain, you see, the effort always to achieve and when that happens you have to really remind yourself that to be aware is the achievement. That's it. There's nothing else to achieve. Once you drum that into yourself it does stop you wanting to go beyond the present moment because whenever you want to achieve something it's always in the future isn't it. When you've achieved it you've achieved it but while you're wanting to achieve it's not here it's over there so the mind is always moving ahead of itself.

So if you find yourself feeling restless and you've got an inkling that it's not really to do because the body feels good and it feels light and it's okay but there's this restlessness, especially not so much at the beginning of a week retreat but maybe within two or three days when you really settle, then just see if some idea of getting something has not crept in again.

The story from the scriptures is of Ānanda. Ānanda was the cousin of the Buddha and he was really practicing hard and getting nowhere and getting all this restlessness and stuff and so he began to give up and he decided that what he would do in this lifetime was create good karma and then have another go in the next one. So the Buddha having heard this or intuiting it appeared by his side and said, "Ānanda, what are you doing mate?"

And he gave him this instruction, he said, "What you've got to do is you've got to have this effort" and he gave the image of tuning a lute. I can't remember the proper word for that instrument but it's a lute, it's a stringed instrument and he said, "To get the right pitch, it mustn't be too tight and it mustn't be too loose. Just getting the right pitch."

And of course, Ānanda in no length of time, having got the right pitch, became fully awakened. Usually these little stories are glossed in the commentary to say things like, "Ānanda went off to the forest for 25 years and became fully enlightened." But actually in the scriptures it said he struggled with it and became fully awakened.

So effort is a cheeky one for us because Western culture is about achieving. It's about achieving, about getting. And one of the problems of the Vipassana school is that it does put to us certain achievements. I mean, they're there. They're called the vipassanāñāṇas, the insights that come with Vipassana. And then there are four stages of sanctity for different stream entrants, once returner, non-returner, and then finally this arahat.

And what that does for us, or the way we can look at it so that it doesn't become some sort of achievement,

is again this feeling that the path is actually well delineated. It's not a we're not on a path which is higgledy-piggledy and it may or may not. It's actually the path leading to breakthrough is very clearly marked, very clearly marked.

Having said that, the path of the vipassana knowledge is not the only way, not the only way. And people have achieved amazing insight very quickly, usually because of some great shock. Somebody close has died or they've fallen off a bridge or something. Something happens which gives them a shock and it can really pull them out of their particular mind state and turn their lives. One of the more interesting ones is this near-death experience that people have. So it's not the I wouldn't say it was the only delineated path. You do get slightly different ones in the Mahāyāna but it's definitely well delineated in this particular school.

And the whole point about the Mahasi's teaching was that it was meant to be a direct attack on this particular path. It was meant to be none of this business about trying to get blissed out or having cups of tea when you want.

It was straight on and he was very successful.

So this business of effort and concentration, you see, the other and those effort by the way and all that comes up in faculties too for those of you who know these things the other combination is calmness and it's badly translated as joy much better translated as interest.

So now interest is a funny emotion. It's the sort that philosophers wonder. It's a sort of wanting to know, but you can feel it sort of coming from the heart. And just as an aside, remember, just ask yourself, did you ever have any problem with concentration when you were interested in something?

So that's why, because the force of our practice is to awaken the intelligence it seems to me much more beneficial to raise interest rather than to worry about concentration and I'm always amazed how that manifests even in animals this sort of wonder.

I was once in a lovely place up in Penang, Malaya. And there was a plantation up there and I was offered to stay up there at this house which was lived in occasionally. And it was a lovely evening so I took this table out onto the forecourt there, wanting to sort of lift myself off the ground because of bugs and stuff, snakes. And I tied this mosquito net to the tree above me and brought me cushions and everything and a cup of coffee and I sat on this table looking out through the mosquito net to the setting sun and as it grew darker and darker I suddenly realized I was facing east. I was a little disappointed.

Now there were these two dogs that every evening would scamper, would chase each other, two very good friends, would chase each other madly around. And on this particular evening, the one that I was sat out there waiting for the sunset, one of these dogs was late. And the other one began to pine and cry a little. And when the dog finally turned up, to my amazement, he sort of ran up. And when he saw this table with this figure and this... He stood there and he went... While the other dog was biting him and doing all sorts

of daft things. I thought, my goodness. What amazing sort of intelligence. Yeah, I must have looked really silly. To a dog, anyway.

So... I can't remember why I went into that. Oh yes, interest. So this quality of wanting to know, even here, just walking down the street with all these cows and bullocks, it's just amazing. They just come towards you wanting to know.

So it's something that we find in all creatures so it's a case of awakening that within us and that wanting to know that wonder sometimes you have to sort of work at it a bit just to raise your energy towards interest and like all these things these are all conditioned all conditionings so the more you condition yourself to become interested the more interested you become.

And the more interested you become the more you practice with verve and with right commitment and the more you practice with verve and right commitment the more you see and the more you're delighted so the more interested you become. So these things have a sort of internal motor and I would say that interest is a real sort of motivation but sometimes you have to feed it especially when those little nasty things come up like boredom which is the direct enemy of interest.

So when that comes up, remember that boredom is what is to be observed and not to be conned by that you need distraction. There was a monk I knew who would go to his teacher and say, I've been watching this breath and I'm really bored. And the teacher said, well, why don't you try watching it down here in the stomach? So he went away and he came back and he said, I'm watching it, but I'm really bored. So he said, well, why don't you try a concentration exercise and look at discs? So there's an exercise of looking at these colored discs, which you use to gain concentration. So he asked him what was his favorite color, and he said, well, it might have been blue. So he said, well, get yourself a disc of blue and just say blue, blue, and that was it. And he came back and he says, really boring. So he said, well, try another colour. This poor monk ended up being depressed. He ended up in hospital. Yeah, he ended up in hospital. And when he finally came out of it, I think he understood the mistake of getting into boredom, trying to escape boredom through distraction.

You have to be very careful and of course if you look at our society that's the problem with all this addiction stuff it's all an escape from the boredom that arises by seeking pleasure in something which always has an inbuilt obsolescence and you can't keep chewing the same gobstopper even if it is blackcurrant. You want a lime gobstopper. So eventually you can't stop eating gobstoppers. Spend all your money on gobstoppers.

So remember that to raise interest, I think, is a very empowering way to put energy into our practice. What supports it is calmness, calmness in the heart and as I say not to confuse that with equanimity, calmness and anything which you find is shaking is shaking. And of course one of the things that happens when you draw up interest and you do begin to see something of course the excitement comes. And that shakes the meditation for them. So as soon as that comes, that's your object. So remember that the mind

and heart are very slippery. They're always shifting off focus. So you have to keep that sort of aliveness.

Now, I opened the talk by saying that by the end of it, once I've been through five of these and seven of those, especially those who haven't come across this teaching before, they'd probably be utterly confused. But luckily, there's a very simple way of getting all these faculties to be balanced. And that, you won't be surprised to hear, is the establishment of awareness.

So what the Buddha says is that when you establish right awareness on the object, all these faculties will come up to support it, just quite naturally. And the quality of awareness is just looking, just observing, just being with the experience. It's its simplicity which foxes us. We always think we have to do something. We always think we have to see something. You don't. All you have to do is look. It's extraordinarily simple.

And in the opening of the discourse on how to establish right mindfulness, this awareness, *satipaṭṭhāna*, the establishment of this level of consciousness, he starts off by saying, he uses the word sikkati, so sikkati means to train. So he says, observe the breath to train it, in other words to get still, to be fairly, to be somewhat concentrated. That's in my morning Vipassanā guidelines. And that's what one of my main teachers used to always, it was his little phrase, somewhat concentrated. Nobody ever knew exactly what he meant, but we got the idea that you needn't be waiting until you're utterly, completely focused before you could, as it were, begin to investigate.

Then the Buddha says, and this is, he's talking now about the breath, and of course the breath is something neutral, and so the other two things are not so obvious, this business of not me, not mine, and the business of how we create problems from it. The most obvious thing to look at is the quality of transience. So he says, keep looking at it. Now, he's suggesting that you actually do that as a purposive.

Like the thought comes in the mind let me watch the transient nature of this at the moment when I see the breath it feels to me like one thing like a string like it's one string. I mean, how long is time? Because the length of time as we experience it is as long as we can hold a frame, a frame of time. So how long is it? Have you ever measured it? I don't know. Less than a second probably, or something like that, I don't know. How long is a piece of time?

Now, that gives us the impression that the whole breath is one joined up experience. But what he's saying is if you keep looking if you keep just putting your eye on it and the more these faculties come up to actually join you and you're actually tuned into the transient nature of the breath that's what you're looking at is it just one string or is it all little pieces all quite separate as you're looking at that and all these faculties of concentration of right effort of that investigation of the Dharma, here it's the *anicca* quality, of the balance of effort with concentration, of that equanimity, balancing the investigation, and of the calmness, balancing the interest.

When all these things rise up, he says you come to a point where there is just enough concentration and just enough intuitive intelligence or insight to arise. And those two words, the awareness and intelligence,

are never separate in that discourse. The two words that I use for this trust of ours, Satipanya, I've actually taken that from a very famous Thai teacher called Buddhadāsa. And it's two nouns, but the way it's put in the scriptures is *ātāpī sampajāno satimā*. *Ātāpī* is the effort and it's sometimes translated as fierce effort but we're much closer to the meaning if we understand relentless effort you don't stop that's why I quote the Mahāsī the continuity of awareness is the secret of success it's the continuity because the more you maintain it the more these spiritual faculties come up.

And you begin by placing the *sati* on the object that's the looking and as you look then you see. So the looking and seeing are both the same faculty it's just that one is passive looking, receiving and then there is the seeing so if you think of any occasion I had one where a friend who came to see me and we were going for a walk his car broke down and we went off to have a look at it. The police had got there because he'd left it on the main road here in Newton Abbot and wheeled it back down and he opened the bonnet. What had happened was that suddenly the engine cut. And because of my long experience with mechanics, I immediately said, well, that's got to do with the electrics. So he opened the bonnet, and I immediately pointed to this object within the engine. Having looked, I saw it must be the dynamo, and I pointed to this. I said, the dynamo's gone. The AA man turned up and having a slightly longer experience in mechanics noticed that the fan belt had gone and pointed to the dynamo which happened to be in a different place yes so.

This case of looking and seeing. And it's the case of getting that clarity so that your car doesn't end up in the scrapyard because you tried to mend it. So these two qualities, the *sati*, the awareness, and that spark, that intuitive grasp of what's happening, arises naturally when the conditions ripen. And in our meditation, when we're sat here, we're just making that continuous, relentless effort of just relaxing, of coming back onto the object. That's another way, perhaps, of translating that word for calmness. *Passaddh i*. You can translate it as relaxing.

And then as it slowly gathers around, there comes the moment where we can hold the position of the observer. Now that's the point where we are seeing the transience, but there's still the sense of the observer. Now the observer means that there's a shaking in the mind one minute we see the sensation of the breath and next minute we're aware of something watching the sensation of the breath and that awareness is a feeling of me being here.

And what's really happening or what you can take as a metaphor or an image is sometimes when you're watching TV and you can see yourself on the screen are you going to watch yourself watching TV or are you going to watch the TV? Now because the light is such you can't get rid of that image of yourself watching TV. But because your interest grows so much in the program, you don't see it anymore. You just get lost in the program itself.

When we are in a state of the observer, there's always that dual state going on, seeing, seeing the seer, seeing, seeing the seer. And of course, because of the speed of the mind and its ability to hold things for us

long enough and substantiate them, give them some sort of solidity, we feel it's one process, that there is an observer constantly observing this breath which is constantly arising and passing away.

But by continuously placing that attention, and that's another word for *sati*, an act of attention, on the object, all these faculties come up and, as it were, the focus narrows and narrows, and with it, time narrows. So time now begins to narrow so much until you're just there and when you're just there there's no time for this switch and the sense of the self disappears and that's when it's possible for this intuitive intelligence to see something very clearly because now it's not shaking and there can't be there can't be in the now there can't be any conceptual thinking. It just can't be, conceptual thinking takes time you can't have a word in a speck of a second so when those moments come up there's always some little insight and they come up in very short blips you might not even know, it can be so short that you don't even know.

But as your meditation grows, these little moments of being absolutely absorbed into the object grow slightly longer. And then when one comes out of that, back to being the observer, and there is that knowing that during that moment there, there was pure *satipaññā*.

Now do remember that none of this you can't make it happen that's the point and that's where the sense of achieving comes so forget that so the Buddha is saying very clearly just train just keep bringing that attention back keep waking it out of that the dullness just keep working with it gently and they'll come that point when you'll begin to see these characteristics one or the other. And as you begin to see that and your interest is drawn, you'll just be drawn naturally into the present moment. And that's when we have just enough awareness and just enough intuitive intelligence to make these little insights.

And these insights are not huge wallops around the back of the head that send you spinning out of the room. They're just little, they're just little, ah, oh, ah, right. And all the time this consciousness is turning, the way it's looking is changing, just in little degrees all the time. And that then has a systemic change because as we change our understanding it changes our relationship so that's the heart coming in and when a relationship changes it expresses itself through what we say and what we do and how we think in a more wise way so that's the process we're going through.

So if I were to bring it all together, there are these five faculties, five spiritual faculties, and there are these seven factors of enlightenment. And the ones to be concerned with are how to develop this awareness, just the looking, just the looking. How to support just the looking by raising interest. How to be very quick to know that some future aim has slipped into the practice and that's the achieving how to be aware of that sort of restlessness that comes around because we're trying too hard how sometimes you're right there but somehow we've slipped with the interest and we're sinking away from it.

So it's a case really of not worrying too much about all these different faculties but just keep reminding oneself that one has to remain bright, vigilant. Now this word vigilance is one of the Buddha's favourites. *Appamādo*, vigilant, diligent, being awake. And in the Vipassanā guidelines I've translated the phrase, my translation there is those who are mindful are in the vicinity of, are in the presence of *Nibbāna*.

Now the actual word he uses is *appamāra*, those who are vigilant, those who are diligent in their practice are in the vicinity and the presence of Nibbāna.

So it only remains for me to wish you fruitful practice and a continuing effort. May you all be liberated even in this very lifetime.

Thank you.

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