Five Spiritual Faculties

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 58:46

Tonight I want to talk about what's called the five spiritual faculties, sort of the complement to the eight thousand defilements. It's very important that we recognize both.

Remember how Steve started his talk last night? I want to read the rest of that sutta. This translation is a little different—it's from Ajahn Sumedho and Pasanno, but it's the same sutta:

"This mind is radiant, but it doesn't show its radiance because passing defilements come and obscure it. The unwise ordinary person does not understand this as it is. And so for them, there is no development of the mind"—basically thinking that defilements come, that's it, they're permanent, there's nothing else to do. "This mind is radiant. It shows its radiance when it is unobscured by passing defilements. The wise noble disciple understands this as it is. Therefore, for them, there is development of mind."

I like this passage because it shows both sides, and that's what we're doing here—developing the mind in ways that we talk about with steady, intelligent awareness. As Steve spoke so clearly last night, this leads to the wisdom that sees, feels, recognizes, and understands the torments of mind, how they work, and allows the wisdom to come in that begins to disentangle us, free us, disidentify from it.

Not at the exact same time, but together with this process, wholesome qualities are happening quite a lot of the time too. It's just as important to recognize the wholesome, uplifting qualities of mind as it is to recognize the torments. We're saying recognize whatever's there, but I want to point out that sometimes there's wholesome. And it's important to recognize these with the same non-judging awareness with which one recognizes the torments.

I'm going to talk about these five faculties tonight. There are lots of ways to discuss them. I'll be somewhat experiential and conversational, and also talking about them in the way that U Tejaniya does, his particular slant. There are many slants, so this isn't definitive, but hopefully helpful and supportive for the way we're practicing here.

These five spiritual faculties, which are going to be very familiar to you, work together. When they come together in a balanced way, Tejaniya calls that intelligent awareness. Sometimes he calls it the meditating mind. For us, when we have that experience—even just briefly—where the awareness is getting its own momentum and there's interest, and whatever's happening isn't so important but you're just there, interested, it's going along... well, there's a pretty good chance, I would say for sure, that those five qualities at least, and there are others too, are coming together in a balanced way. That's when you can see the awareness and the wisdom are really rolling along. So it's very important to recognize these.

I'll read a bit from the book. When you experience wholesome mind states—I say wholesome rather than good, because we tend to think of good as feeling good, and it doesn't necessarily mean that—actively recognize them, actively remember them. Remembering is like mindfulness. Not to hold on, but to recognize them, remind yourself that you're experiencing a wholesome mind state. Let it be conscious, not swept under the rug.

Remember that wholesome mind states are possible—this is for when you're having a hard time—and that this is what the wholesome mind state feels like. In other words, just like with the kilesas, the defilements, recognize it. Because we're hopefully meeting it with steady awareness, we'll also see the causes and conditions that give rise to it and that strengthen it. If you know why it's wholesome or how it feels wholesome, try to see that for yourself. That will help you recognize it and remember, and it will strengthen faith later when you can't recognize any wholesome mind state and you start to think there never has been one in your life. Then you can try to actively remember: oh yeah, I had that moment of faith three and a half weeks ago.

These five qualities of mind are saddha, faith; viriya, energy; sati, mindfulness, which we've talked about a lot already; samadhi, often translated as concentration but which I want to translate as collectedness or balance of mind; and paññā, wisdom. Each of these is a huge field for discussion. I can only give little snapshots tonight, but my hope is to trigger in you the interest and recognition so that you explore it in your own experience. If you take this in only as the first level of wisdom—secondhand wisdom—and just remember it, that might help you know these qualities exist. But really I want to get your mind curious, to bring it into awareness.

To start by talking about saddha, or faith: it came up in one of the groups today, and it is a key state of heart and mind for actually doing our practice. We usually think of faith as inspired by what's called bright faith—by seeing or hearing someone, or seeing something about someone else, or something we read. The beginning of faith, the first inspiration of it, generally comes from some outside source. A lot of people hear the Dalai Lama talk and get all inspired, for example.

The classical definition of faith in Buddhist countries would be faith in Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. You have faith in that and it gives you energy. But that doesn't necessarily work for us if we haven't been born and brought up in a Buddhist culture; it doesn't mean anything particularly. Sometimes when we're not thinking of faith as a quality of heart and mind, we keep thinking faith means faith in Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, or faith in something. That's a kind of intellectual understanding. But it's not how we can experience it here.

It's a mental factor, an experience of mind, of heart. So I want to describe some of the ways it's characterized and how I experience it.

This bright faith, this first inspiration—"inspiration" is actually a good translation in English. When you think of times you've felt inspired, there's an energy, isn't there? A kind of brightness in the mind, in the

body, and an uplifted quality. The manifestation of it in our practice, as Sayadaw U Pandita used to describe it, is that saddha, faith, manifests as the willingness to do. It's what gives us, for a moment, for some time, the commitment, the energy to actually say, in terms of our practice, "Okay, another moment of awareness. Okay, I will not get in my car and leave." I know most of you have had that thought. Sometimes we think we should check car keys at the door. But that willingness—sometimes it's just a moment of grim determination, heavy and forced—that's not faith. But you know what I mean by that sense of something that inspires us. It's simply the willingness to do.

And so it may be hearing or thinking about the Buddha and what he discovered. It may be seeing someone else, or talking to a friend, or reading in a book—anything that sparks in us, "Okay, there's something here, something I want to explore, something I want to discover." And of course, it's moment to moment. Sometimes it can really give us a lot of commitment, carrying us for a while. But in the beginning, this bright faith is still inspired from outside.

I feel a lot of empathy for people who are on their very first intensive meditation retreat, who haven't done a lot of practice, because the only faith you can have at that point is this bright faith. The other kind, verified faith, comes from our own experience. When we've gone through some experience and we really see, "Oh, it's really true. If there's just awareness of clinging and the clinging goes away, there's peace"—that's really true. You know it for yourself; it's verified. And that's a deeper, more personally accessible level of faith.

But even faith coming from the outside gives us confidence, gives us energy. I remember hearing on the radio when Obama was first elected president, right after, the day after. They were interviewing a young African-American woman in Brooklyn or somewhere. I still get chills. I can't remember exactly what she said, but she was so inspired to think that she could do something different, something more with her life than she had ever thought was possible for her. And you could hear in her voice that energy, that inspiration, that commitment.

We catch it from each other. That's exactly how inspiration works. That's one of the beauties of sangha. Even here, you're hitting a place where you're slumping through the day and you think, "I can't find one reason to be here. I can't remember why I came." And then somebody just walks by and something about the way they walk or the way they're practicing strikes you. And you go, "Okay, if they can do it, I can do it"—hopefully in a wholesome, faithful way. And then we take turns inspiring one another.

So just beginning to recognize that feeling when it arises in the mind is important, because it gives us the energy, the confidence, the willingness to do.

Now, this faith is not greed. Greed thinks about results. You could also have energy and commitment by thinking, "If I do this, I'm going to get that." That's not faith—that's greed. Faith may include the sense of, "Yes, it is possible to free the mind from kilesa, from defilement," as Steve was saying last night. But then the faith gives us the confidence without feeding the greed of "When am I going to get it?" Instead, it gives

us the confidence to open into the moment with awareness. It gives us the confidence to drop into the moment, into the unknown, to just do the practice. That's how you know it's faith—you can feel the upliftingness, the wholesomeness of it.

Where if it's greed, "Yes, by God, I want to rid my mind of kalesha, and by tomorrow!" – if you tune into that, you can feel it doesn't feel uplifting. It may feel like it's giving energy, but you can feel the difference in your mind. And if you don't know what I'm talking about, explore and see. That's what I'm trying to inspire – to look and see. Because when it's wholesome, it's not feeding kalesha, it's not feeding defilement, and it's not fueled by defilement.

So faith is essential. Without it, we just don't have the energy, the willingness to do. Otherwise it's just, "Well, that sounds like a nice idea. What's on TV?" Or, "That's the bell in the morning? Okay, yeah, I'm not letting those guys get up before me. I'm rolling over. It doesn't matter."

All of the five faculties work together in balance. And faith needs to come with a balance of wisdom – not just intellectual, but clear seeing. Because otherwise, faith can be kind of blind, where you're so inspired by someone. "Yes, if they can swim the English Channel, so can I!" And without any training, you jump in and start to swim. That's blind faith – unless you know you're a world-class swimmer and you can do it. But faith needs to be balanced with wisdom, the clear seeing of what's actually so.

Faith, this collecting of our energy, this uplifting quality, this willingness to do, is also for many of us in this culture so important because it can help to counteract, to help move through our patterns of self-doubt. Self-doubt, self-judgment – which I know one or two people here have experienced once or twice during the course of this retreat. And it's so strong. In this culture – I don't know if it's Western culture or the rational scientific worldview or what – but certainly we know from meeting with people in meditation retreats, and I see it here, all over this country, and in Europe, it just seems to be one of our stronger conditionings. Not everybody, but many people.

Our personalities, our belief that "I'm the one doing it, I'm the one making this happen," is so strong. So we take it all so personally. If it's pleasant, if it goes the way we want, that's a personal success. If it isn't going the way we want, if it's unpleasant, it's a personal failure. And none of that is inspiring faith. That gets us really caught up in success and failure and self-doubt.

Ajahn Sumedho, whom I quoted last night – he's an American man, but he spent many years as a monk with Ajahn Chah, who was a great Thai forest meditation master. He lived in Thailand, learned Thai, taught in Thailand, and then Ajahn Chah sent him to England to bring that monastic order to the West. Once some of us were meeting with Ajahn Sumedho and he was just talking about teaching. Someone asked him, "Do you notice any difference between meditation patterns when you're working with Thai people versus when you're working with Westerners?"

This is broad, but I found what he said quite interesting. He said his opinion at that time was that one of

the biggest hindrances he'd seen for Westerners in our practice of meditation is self-doubt. Self-doubt in our own insights, self-doubt in our own experience of awareness, in our own little moments of freedom, of liberation – even if momentary freedom from patterns that we suffer from. And he said he thinks it's because we give so much belief to our personalities, so much weight to our personalities, that we get caught back into them immediately.

I would put that in terms of what I said before: we think we're doing everything. It's all up to us. Even when it's going really well – say here on retreat, when there's a momentum of mindfulness and it's going along and there's no sense of personal effort and you're having fun and it's flowing – it's really common to doubt it. Even a dear friend of mine who's been a meditation teacher for years said, "Well, this can't be right because it's just going along and I'm not doing it. Somehow, it's too easy. Something's wrong." Because we think it's all about me. We get caught back into the personality pattern. And when it isn't going well, of course, it's so clear that that's our fault because we're jerks and hopeless.

But he said he's really talking about those times of just touching awareness. Or if you start to recognize these wholesome qualities I'm talking about, you think, "Well, okay, it's here now, but that's a fluke. It just came in by chance, and it'll go because it's nothing to do with me." In a way, it's not about "me." It's just nature. Just as the defilements have their nature – the causes and effects and how they behave, doing their job – so too do the wholesome qualities.

So too does faith.

But it's very interesting, this way we don't trust ourselves because we think it's all about "me," and it's cheating. This stuff just happens by itself.

Just to give you an alternative possibility, one little example. Some years ago in Burma, I was teaching alongside Sayadaw U Lakkhana, who's a Mahasi-style Burmese teacher. In the way he was teaching, he had been saying in a talk about this noting practice—whatever arises, the mind notes it, you go to it and note it. He was saying, "Note it three times. If you note it three times, it'll go away." Which, you know, forget about it. That's not what happens.

So he was saying that. And then the way those retreats work, when he would leave, the other Western teacher and I would take questions—this was a retreat for Westerners. My friend U Lamang was translating for Sayadaw, who spoke in Burmese. So somebody said, "Hey, I'm noting it three times. I'm here, I'm mindful, and it's not going away. What am I doing wrong?" And they were so upset—it was like a whole crisis. Which we do, right? "What am I doing wrong?"

So we just talked about that. Later, I was speaking with the translator, and he said, "Oh, that was so interesting. Because it's the same for us. When we note it three times, it doesn't go away. And I always wondered." I said, "Oh, and then what do you do when it doesn't go away?" He said, "We go, 'Oh, well, never mind.'"

It's an alternative possibility. You just say, "Huh, what? Oh, well, never mind." You don't have to figure out how you're failing.

So this sense of faith, of not taking it so personally. Again, Sayadaw U Tejaniya: "The problem many yogis have is that you're so used to making things happen in your life. In daily life, they're used to setting themselves goals, applying a lot of effort, and achieving what they want. Then they do the same in meditation. They want to be good, very good, the best. When they—you, we—are not as good as they want to be, they quickly become disappointed. That's why they lose faith and why they lose interest in practice."

You see? That's a faith based on getting results. It isn't really the uplifting faith—it slides into wanting. And then we do get discouraged, falling into self-doubt.

So looking again and seeing that sometimes we can actively turn to outside resources when we don't find the inner resources that bring up the faith, or the memory, or verified faith. We re-tap into that inspiration, each of us finding what works for us. Nothing wrong with that. Really helpful.

But you see, tuning into that sense of uplifting, of commitment, of willingness to practice in our mind—that is saddhā. And learning to recognize and trust that. At the same time, not taking it personally, just as we don't take the defilements personally. Cause and effect.

There's one sutta called "The Inquirer," where the Buddha is telling someone what things to look for in a teacher to see if they're completely awakened, like the Buddha himself. At one point, the Buddha says, "Yes, purified states are found—purified states of mind are found—in the Tathagata," meaning himself. "There are purified states in my mind. They are my pathway, my domain, where I live."

But I do not identify with them. There is no craving for them—just their recognition. This is here, how it arises, what its effects are.

It seems obvious, and it's true in this order, that the arising of faith, the willingness to do, then strengthens the next factor, which is virya, or energy. In the way Ajahn Tejaniya is talking about it, it's a mental factor. So we're talking about mental energy—not necessarily the bodily energy to run a marathon or something. That comes from mental energy, of course, but here we're talking about mental energy specifically.

I'm using "energy" rather than "effort" deliberately. Sometimes virya is translated as "wise effort," but for many of us, effort comes together with a sense of need, of doing to achieve, and a kind of leaning forward for a result that's fed by striving. That would be unwise effort. But here, virya as energy, mental energy in the mind—just by itself, depending on the context, it's not necessarily wholesome or one of the five spiritual faculties. There can be enormous energy in the mind directing us to do amazing things that aren't necessarily coming together with right view, right understanding, and mindfulness.

Back to my tennis example: if you watch these players, it's amazing the amount of moment-to-moment clarity and virya they have to bring up with each point. I love watching just to see the level that these

qualities can be cultivated to. But is the motivation, are the surrounding mental factors, necessarily all wholesome ones? I have my doubts. There's got to be a strong element of wanting, of craving, and self-identification. I'm not saying that's a horrible thing, but it isn't wholesome. It's not purity of mind. Certainly you can see as they get frustrated in a match—okay, there's a little bit of aversion being fed too. Enormous virya, and it's not a bad thing in the world to play tennis, but it isn't the wholesome state of virya as a spiritual faculty.

So that's how we're talking about it here. We call this "ethically variable" virya. It takes on wholesome or unwholesome qualities depending on what other mental factors are arising together with it. If we want to call it a spiritual faculty, then it comes together with wisdom, with right view, with mindfulness.

As an internal experience—explore it for yourself, because we're all different and we have different access to virya—but the way we're talking about it here as mental energy is that it's not pushing. Rather, it's a sense of persistence, of patience. Not resignation, not negativity, but that quality of "never give up." Sayadaw has that big sign on the door into his kuti: "Never give up." And all that means is when you come and say, "Oh, I was aware of this and this and that, but then there was just aversion," we say, "Oh, awareness of aversion. Next thing." That's just never give up. And now this, and now this. It doesn't have to be dramatic—"Never give up, my God!"—but just showing up, showing up, showing up.

So it's a balanced kind of effort. If it's all intensity, you can't keep going with it. You get exhausted. So it's this patience, this persistence, with a quality of interest, not pushing for a result. But it also has—you can feel this—it's described as not shrinking back from the difficult.

You can notice this when some difficult experience comes up in your mind. If there's awareness, you're not trying to do it right, but the awareness is just there. Something happened today—I can't remember what—but I was doing something and some negative state came up. I guess I was thinking about this because I've been contemplating these teachings. I could just see how the awareness, the energy in the mind, when that unpleasant state came, just wanted to go, "No, I don't want to go there." And virya is just like, no, not shrinking back. Just staying here, just meeting what's happening. It's a kind of courage. Moment after moment after moment with the difficult, with the unwholesome—just not shrinking back.

And with the wholesome, virya supports what is wholesome. So let's say you're recognizing, you're feeling saddha, faith, in your experience.

It's kind of uplifting. And then virya comes in to recognize it, to meet it, to be there with it too. It supports the wholesome.

But really here, in the way we're practicing, virya shows up simply as that patient willingness never to give up. Am I aware now? Am I aware now? Notice that quality of not shrinking back.

Sometimes virya is just not there. But as we get more familiar with these wholesome qualities, sometimes you can start to actually look and recognize that it could be there—you're just not noticing it. The kilesas

make more noise. The defilements, they kick up a ruckus. And so they call our attention in a wholesome way or an unwholesome way. But sometimes we can notice that virya is there.

Virya is not something I have in overwhelming amounts. I have to work with noticing it. It's there. We all have it. We couldn't even stand up without it.

Take something simple, like getting out of bed in the morning. Not when there's a huge thing pressing, but just lying there thinking, I don't know... I'm aware, and I can be just as aware like this. And if I fall asleep, so what? Whatever happens doesn't matter. When I wake up, I'll be aware again. Which, on one level, is true. But then there's another part where you can just be aware of the whole thing. You can see the kind of unwholesome craving coming in. And the awareness notices that.

I do this myself a lot. Suddenly I'll just remember—like Tejaniya was saying—I'll just remember virya. And it's kind of, oh yeah, just that meeting what's happening. It meets that unwholesome, and you just get up. No big deal.

So we can actually, being familiar with these qualities, turn to the wholesome more often than we might think. This is development of mind. This is strengthening the wholesome. But it's done with wisdom, not with wanting, not with aversion.

For it to be wise virya, wise effort, it comes together. It's not fed by kilesa. You could do amazing things. You can look like you're practicing really well, sit through a sitting without moving, absolutely committed. But the motivation could be complete aversion. You know what I mean? You think you're doing good practice, but look and see—if the motivation is aversion, it's not wise effort. It's unwise effort, because what's being strengthened is aversion.

So you can check. When you feel that you're using a lot of energy, physically or mentally, sometimes we feel like there's virya, but it feels like we're pushing, really pushing, getting fatigued just from sitting. Then just check. Check in the background the quality in the mind. It's the same thing we've been saying all along.

Look and see if in this effort that we're putting out—where it feels like, well, I'm really working hard here, this is what I should be doing—it's back to the faith issue, the not trusting. Unless we're working so hard we're about to fall on our face from exhaustion, we feel like we're not really practicing.

So look and see when it starts to feel like that. Are you wanting, expecting, or trying to make a particular thing happen? Or do you have the expectation in the back of your mind that a certain thing has to happen for it to be okay?

Just looking and seeing. And for sure, that effort is being fed by greed, by wanting. Or is the effort in some subtle way trying to make something stop happening? Back to that thing about noting—if you note it three times, it goes away. So we say, okay, let me note it, note it, note it, go away.

Almost everyone I've talked to over time, at some point here, has this puzzling experience. They say, "I know I'm really aware of this thing. I'm describing it really clearly." And then they'll kind of stop and look puzzled, and you say, "But what? You mean?" We know—"But it's still here." Implicit in that is the belief that if we were aware rightly, it would go away. That's aversion.

So wise effort is just not shrinking back from the difficult, but not pounding it with a stick either. Just here we are. Or sometimes we're using a lot of effort, trying, and we don't even know what we're trying to get or what we're trying to stop, but there's just a feeling of dissatisfaction or confusion. We don't know what to do, so we're trying this and trying that. And that's delusion. That's *moha*.

So then just settle back and remember: the only task is just awareness. Am I aware right now? That's all. And you see, we're back to faith—needing some faith to trust enough to do that.

Another teaching from U Tejaniya about the motivation of wise effort: he says effort that comes with a defilement is, of course, wrong effort. Most yogis make an effort with some kind of desire. Effort comes together with defilement. So you just need to be very clear whether you're making an effort with *lobha*, with greed, or whether there's this other quality, *chanda*, which is sometimes translated as "wholesome desire." I find that confusing. It's more like a zeal, an interest, a willingness. It's not a greed for a result.

He says when you make an effort with greed, with *lobha*, you become tense and you'll suffer. When you're successful, you'll feel very happy. And when you're not, you may become upset or even depressed. That's one of the results we can see—it's a clue that it's unwise effort.

But when the effort comes with faith, with willingness to do, with *chanda*—wise desire, desire for spiritual growth—you don't suffer. The mind will become stronger, more powerful, more balanced. When you "succeed," you will not feel elated. And when you "don't succeed," you don't feel upset. This is the result of right effort.

You never give up, but again and again and again, just meeting the moment. We're not elated, we're not depressed, because it's just what's happening now. What's happening now? Just the effort to meet the moment—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. There's nothing to be elated or depressed about. So that's another sign that it's a more balanced effort. It's courage, not shrinking back.

Now, mindfulness—*sati*—I don't think I need to say a lot about since that's what we've been talking about since the beginning of the retreat. It's just that simple awareness, not forgetting. Tejaniya likes to talk about it this way: it's just not forgetting. Don't forget to watch yourself. Don't forget awareness—just in that very simple, light, relaxed way.

Now, mindfulness—and I think hopefully you're starting to get this—doesn't have to come together with a heavy directed focus. Are you starting to at all believe that? Yet?

I know for many people, including me, who have done other practices, for many years mindfulness was

always coming together with a kind of very focused quality of mind. And because they often came together, it was easy to confuse them, to think that mindfulness meant that heavy focus, that it was part of mindfulness, that you have to have that.

What we're hoping you're starting to see here is: not. That's a different quality of mind.

So mindfulness is just this simple moment-to-moment awareness—just not forgetting. Am I aware? What's happening now? It's not that we have to put it in and hold on, but as soon as you remember, here it is again. That accessible. The virya keeps us doing it.

The steadiness of awareness, as we've said ten million times already in four days, leads to momentum. It starts to get its own momentum, which leads to continuity. We're committing to continuity, but all we can do is whenever we recognize we're not aware, we're back in awareness. Continuity doesn't mean we try to hold on to every moment and that we can somehow make it be steady. That's out of our control. That's wrong effort. But that persistence—that each moment of waking up in mindfulness, we're willing to do it. The faith gives us the willingness to do it. The virya gives us the ability not to shrink back.

The steadiness of mindfulness leads to the mindfulness getting its own momentum, which cultivates samadhi, the fourth factor. And I want to say a bit about this, especially in terms of how we're practicing vipassana here.

Samadhi is often translated into English as concentration. In my experience of working with a lot of people on retreat, it's one of the qualities of mind—and again, it's ethically neutral, just as virya is. You could really have a very collected mind in service of sneaking into a house and stealing something without getting caught.

We often think of samadhi as this one-pointed, really focused, intensive concentration leading to absorption, to jhana, which is one manifestation of samadhi. But often it comes to be that that's what people call concentration, and that's what they think the factor of concentration in our experience should feel like. And because when it is really heavy and deeply focused like that, you sometimes have experiences. We like experiences because then our self-doubt kind of goes away and we think, "I'm doing something and I'm getting somewhere." So it feels good, and we want more concentration, and we get really hooked. And when you can't get that kind of concentration, that kind of one-pointed absorption, you think, "I can't do it, and everyone else can." There's a huge amount of suffering. I've worked with a lot of people suffering so much—not from not being able to do it, but from the idea that that's the only thing that means really good practice, that that's what wisdom comes from, that that's what it's all about.

So I would like to say: no, it's not what it's all about. It's one of the factors.

Here, samadhi is more... Steve Smith likes to describe it as "perfectly put together." The mind is perfectly put together. Samadhi is really a mind that's balanced, a mind that's steady, that's stable. It doesn't have to be a unification of mind in the sense of all focused and absorbed on one object, object-oriented. It's unified

in the sense that all the scattered mental energy all over the place is collected and right here.

The experience we can have of vipassana samadhi—this steadiness of mind—is peaceful, but it's also relaxed. It's light, it's cool, it's flexible. Yes, it's pleasant, but this kind of samadhi is not just about one-pointed, object-oriented focusing.

I'm going to call that other kind shamatha, samatha—tranquility practice—which is a very valid and useful practice. But here, the samadhi that develops through the steadiness of awareness on whatever is happening, this vipassana samadhi, has a different quality.

Sayadaw Tejaniya says vipassana samadhi does not depend on an object for its stability. In shamatha samadhi, whether it's the breath or a light or whatever, the mind just comes. You focus, focus, focus. And as the mind does get very unified and strong and collected, it's peaceful in a way. Because as Steve said last night when he was describing the three levels of kilesa, the second level of obsessive kilesa is kind of kept away by the collected mind. When you're really focused on something, greed isn't coming up, aversion isn't coming up, doubt isn't coming up. And it is lovely—definitely lovely. But it doesn't have to just be one-pointed focus.

The way Sayadaw Tejaniya talks about it—and I'm going to talk about it that way since that's how we're practicing—he really doesn't stress focus.

In fact, he tries to help people break free from being really attached to focus. He says that kind of samadhi—very focused and one-pointed—is also kind of heavy. It's brittle, it's fragile. It really depends on having all the circumstances just right so you're not pulled out, so you can really concentrate. And as it gets heavy, wisdom isn't going to arise because you're not seeing anything else except just that one object; the mind is absorbed into it. Wisdom isn't arising there.

So Vipassana Samadhi does not depend on an object for its stability. The stability in the mind, the collectedness in the mind, comes from right understanding, from right view, which together with the continuity of awareness gives the mind stability.

How do we experience that? How can you recognize it in your practice? A lot of times we don't even think of it as samadhi because we have this other idea so strongly ingrained. As Tejaniya says, we're looking for some kind of state almost like a trance, and that's what we want from samadhi.

But this kind we're talking about is quite different—the mind is flexible, open, relaxed, awake and alert. There's a sense that whatever's arising is not a distraction. It's not like, "Oh my God, that sound is going to wreck my samadhi!" or "These people walking too fast are wrecking my samadhi," or "If I have to make that phone call, it's going to ruin my samadhi." This is a balance of mind that comes from right view—just awareness of this, without the mind constantly getting caught in liking and disliking objects. That's where we get all upset and distressed.

When awareness is simply meeting what's happening moment after moment without liking, without disliking, this freshness arises, this flexibility, this equanimity. The mind isn't fragile or brittle, so whatever's arising isn't a distraction. Learn how to recognize that, because it feels different from really heavy focus.

This kind of samadhi takes longer to develop, sometimes, on a retreat like this. And it's one of the things that people who've done a lot of practice in other styles find themselves distrusting when they try this approach—because it's like you've got no proof that anything's happening, until you start to notice the cause and effect with awareness.

I remember one time when I was sitting with Tejaniya in Burma, maybe one of the first times. As Steve has probably mentioned, there's talking there; it's not in complete silence. I was doing my walking meditation somewhere, and someone came up and started talking to me. My response was just, "Okay, the usual." I'd gotten used to it by then. In the beginning, people approaching felt like they were wrecking my practice—they don't even walk back and forth in lanes, they just walk across and through—and I'd wonder how anyone could develop any steadiness.

But by this time I was more balanced with it. I was just walking and aware, pretty present with whatever was happening. There was a sense—I wasn't calling it samadhi—but there was this sense of presence, flexibility, balance of mind, steadiness of mind. This person came up and talked. I stopped. That was just the next thing happening; I wasn't thinking about it. We had a little conversation, then I went back to walking.

And I noticed that the awareness was actually even stronger than it had been before the conversation, that the mind was steadier, even more collected. Awareness had been going through the talking, and not only was it not a distraction, it was as much a seed of strengthening awareness and samadhi as anything else.

That's a little moment of verified faith. You see, "Oh, it's a different kind of samadhi." Exploring moments like that becomes illuminating. And then, of course, as with most pleasant things, the habit of mind comes in: "Oh, how can I catch it?" That's where virya comes—just bringing awareness to that. "Oh, that's wanting." You can feel it. And then wanting becomes the next object of awareness. It doesn't have to be such a distraction if the steadiness of awareness keeps going, which is another way samadhi manifests.

The awareness, the steadiness, begins to have more and more of its own momentum. As someone said in a group today or yesterday, they started to be aware of all kinds of little stuff they didn't even know was there, things they weren't looking for. Awareness was just doing its own job. It starts to get stronger and subtler, noticing all kinds of things. "Oh, that's happening."

I didn't know that. And it's really this sense of *I'm not doing it* or looking for it. The awareness is just getting steadier and stronger, gaining its own momentum. That's also a way you can experience samadhi

in the mind.

So the ingredients for samadhi are, of course, right attitude—not fueled by greed or aversion, not all about "me getting something." Mindfulness, the steadiness of mindfulness, and the continuity of mindfulness, just as I said. It's not a forcing kind of energy.

I would encourage you to feel free to experiment with this. Not like testing to see if something is really true or not, because that's a little bit of aversion in the mind. But don't be so afraid that you're going to wreck your samadhi that you're walking around on tenterhooks.

I think I mentioned before—I think it was this retreat—that I spent one retreat in a different style of practice with a strong kind of focused moment-to-moment samadhi. We were landing on one object and really being present with it, then landing attention on the next object, a kind of noting called momentary samadhi. But it had that element of very strong focusing. It was helpful; I'm not saying it wasn't helpful. But I didn't recognize until I was finished with that retreat that I had spent about a month in a very strongly steady, clear awareness, moment to moment, strong samadhi like that, focusing. Yet there had been this attitude in the mind...

It's like I was walking around like this, with my mind like this, trying to hold on to the samadhi. *I worked so hard for this. And this is a sign that practice is working. I don't want it to go away.* Identification with it, enjoying it, and wondering what it means about me. *Finally, I never thought I could have samadhi, but here it is.*

And when I looked back, I thought, how could I not see that? My God. It was so stressful and tight.

So here, we say it doesn't matter—just look and go, "Oh, wanting in the mind." Just playing with it and seeing. "Oh no, I better not look because that might mess up my—" Oh, look at that. Attachment feels like this. Just be free to play with it and see. It'll go away because, you know what? Everything does. And it'll come back again.

So we're not holding on, but we're really learning through wise attention what the causes are, what the conditions are that strengthen samadhi. And that's just wise attention, understanding, not taking it personally, knowing it's all just nature, seeing cause and effect, and continuity of awareness. Wishing it were so isn't one of them. Thinking, "If I want samadhi hard enough, maybe it'll come" isn't really one of the causes and conditions that brings it about.

And so we're just free to keep looking and seeing, looking and seeing, not trying to hold on to a state, not taking it personally. That's how the wisdom factor starts to manifest.

And so that's the fifth—wisdom.

Wisdom, as I think we've said a couple of times—I've certainly said in the groups—one way you can talk about wisdom is on three levels. The first level, and this is in the suttas, Tejaniya talks about it a lot but it's

actually in the suttas, is what we've been discussing: secondhand wisdom. Or as Steve said with right view, the voice of another—some information. Even that level of wisdom is a form of paññā and is helpful in terms of the five spiritual faculties working together. A certain kind of practicality, a sense of the wisdom of knowing how to practice, knowing what to do. That's a kind of paññā, and that's useful.

It's not transformative wisdom, but as Tejaniya talks about how the five spiritual faculties working together are what really make intelligent awareness, he says, "I'm not talking about deep transformative wisdom. I'm really talking about this practical paññā, practical wisdom of just knowing how to practice." Knowing what it feels like when there's awareness and when there's not. Being able to look into the mind and get a feeling for how much effort is being put out or not. Just very practical stuff.

So that's the first level of wisdom—information. And the second level, combining the first and second, is this thinking about things, thinking it over, cogitating, looking in our experience and going, "Yeah, that really does make sense."

I can really see. And this has also been coming up in groups. That's often the level where we say, "I really know. For example, I really know impermanence. I know it's true. So how come I keep getting caught in clinging and disappointment?"

Sayadaw U Tejaniya says something about this a lot, not as a judgment. He goes, "Oh, well, there's a lot of awareness. You're seeing this whole process of something arising and the clinging to it, and then it goes away and the disappointment. And then you say, 'I know it, but how come this is all happening?' I say there's a lot of awareness, but there's not enough wisdom."

Because the really deep transformative wisdom is the third level of wisdom—insight wisdom—that is an effect. It's not something that we can input or wish to happen. It's not in our control, which I find hugely relieving.

So the steadiness of awareness, the balance of mind, the faith, the energy—all of that together that allows the steadiness of practice—in itself wisdom then does the work of freeing the mind and heart from kilesas. Not our wanting, not our pushing, not our trying. We can't make the wisdom; we can just have the faith and the energy for the steadiness of samādhi, the steadiness of mindfulness that leads to the balance, the collectedness of mind that allows wisdom to arise. And then wisdom does the work.

Just one last thing: all of these five qualities need to work together in balance. And they do balance themselves. You can feel when it's like that. But let me read Tejaniya's words again, since I wanted to do it more his way.

He says, "Yes, definitely, the five spiritual faculties work together. If any one of them becomes too strong, if it does too much of the work, it kind of blots out the other four. The others cannot be effective anymore. They can no longer do their work properly."

Then he qualifies this. If somebody has too much samādhi, the wisdom is not strong and cannot grow. If there's that just zooming-in focus, there's not space for the wisdom to arise and grow. The vīriya, the energy, cannot be strong because of the heavy concentration, and sati, mindfulness, is not sharp. And if those three are not working well, then saddhā will suffer. You start losing confidence in the practice.

If the wisdom faculty is too strong—and here later he clarifies, by the way, he doesn't mean insight wisdom; he said that can never be too strong—but the wisdom faculty of rational understanding, seeing clearly, being practical, investigating is an aspect of wisdom. Interest is an aspect of wisdom. If that gets too strong, if there's too much interest, intellect, questioning, investigation in that way, too much thinking, then there's no samādhi. The mind has no stability.

And this is where faith needs to balance that kind of wisdom. Sometimes this wisdom and thinking and analyzing and questioning manifests as wisdom, but we end up in big doubt. And that's where we need the inspiration of faith to just do, to just say, "Okay, awareness is like this. What's happening now?" So the mind has no stability, and again, this leads to the deterioration of the remaining faculties, and faith suffers, of course, again.

So the five faculties need to work together in balance. And they do. Sometimes you can recognize they're out of balance, like getting really focused in and you don't know what else is going on. And you don't berate yourself, but you can say, "Oh, let me just get a little interested. What else can the awareness notice right here?" You just bring in a little bit of interest. Or with too much questioning, see if you can get that inspiration, the trust, to just do again. A lot of effort and the mind's jumping all over the place—you might want to let the attention get a little more quiet, a little more settled for a minute.

So we can play with these qualities. But the most important is the recognition, really seeing through the steadiness of attention the wholesome qualities, how they manifest, how they support our practice, and how they lead to the development of wisdom, freeing our heart and mind.

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