Faith: Giving Confidence for Our Path

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 56:13

So tonight, what I am going to talk about is the quality of mind, of heart, of faith, which is given quite an importance in the teachings, in the suttas.

Last night, Winnie mentioned how all the aspects of the path work together, kind of come together and support one another. And as maybe you're seeing, and probably you all already knew anyway, this path, this retreat, requires a huge commitment, doesn't it? Over and over. Not just a one-time commitment—you got here, you thought that was the big commitment, and it wasn't even starting yet.

This perseverance, this commitment, and with wise attitude, the commitment is simply to meet each arising moment fully, wholeheartedly, with open, interested attention, without wanting, without aversion. How do you do that? How do any of us really cultivate that quality of energy, of effort, that we can continue to meet the moment? It takes a huge effort, but it's not the effort of wanting, of pushing, of aversion. Where does this come from? What is it that gives us this energy that leads to mindfulness, to wisdom?

The Buddha spoke often about five faculties—five spiritual faculties they're called—five specific qualities of mind and heart that we can experience, that we do experience, that we can recognize, that circle around and support each other. Sometimes they're talked about in a linear way, because that's how our minds work, that's how we can talk. The first one is faith, which is balanced with discerning wisdom, and this balance is what gives us the energy to do. So there's faith, wisdom, energy, mindfulness, and collectedness of mind, or concentration. These five qualities are in balance whenever the meditating mind is balanced—these five qualities are there.

One of the ways the Buddha talks about faith, saddha in Pali, is as the first, the initiating, of these qualities. It's the quality of mind and heart that you could say kick-starts the energy. It's the quality that opens us and gives us this confidence, this energy, this willingness to do, but from another motivation than wanting, than aversion, than our usual "me, me, me, what can I get?" So that's why I want to talk about saddha. It's a beautiful quality of heart and mind.

The translation into English of "faith," as with all English words, has a lot of different baggage and connotations for different people. Some people might find it a beautiful word, but one time we were teaching a retreat, I think it was at Spirit Rock, and one of us teachers talked about faith, and someone said humorously, "Oh, you mean the F word?" They weren't really thrilled to hear about faith.

So just to say from the beginning, this quality of saddha is not at all about believing in or signing up to a

certain set of beliefs. The faith the Buddha's talking about here is a quality of mind. It doesn't mean that to be a card-carrying Buddhist Vipassana practitioner, you have to sign up to a certain set of beliefs. To me, that would be more deadening than enlivening.

We all have different relationships to faith in our personal history. Sometimes it's a very supportive idea. Sometimes it's been the description of a certain set of beliefs that we felt has been put on us, that we had to follow, and that we have somehow come into reaction to. But here, as far as I can tell, pretty much everything the Buddha taught is speaking from a practical, experiential point of view. What qualities help us wake up?

The quality of faith, saddha, is a mental state, a mental quality that we experience in our heart and mind that we can recognize. It's not about concepts or views or ideas, but it's a quality the effect of which is that it uplifts and brightens the heart, brightens the mind. It brings in a sense of inspiration. So it's a quality that we can feel.

The Abhidhamma, which is complex but has kind of nice descriptions of all the different mental qualities, describes the function of saddha as to clarify, as a muddy lake becomes clear. I'll say in a minute, I didn't used to quite understand that, but lately it's been making more sense. Another function is to set forth. The manifestation, the way it shows up, is again non-fogginess of mind. So those of you who are just falling asleep, all the fogginess—a little inspiration of faith can sometimes bring a jolt of waking-up energy. Non-fogginess as removal of the heart's, the mind's impurities, those qualities that are causing us suffering in the moment. And as confidence, as resolution, or as Sayadaw U Pandita describes it, faith, saddha in the mind, gives us the willingness to do. And that's the next quality of the five faculties: viriya, energy.

So, to talk a bit about this sense of faith as a quality that uplifts, that brightens the heart, the mind, that energizes in a wholesome way, that clears it—it's a really great thing to begin to tune into. In a minute I'll talk about seeing each for ourselves what does inspire this quality of faith, of inspiration. But how does it clear? How does it function as giving confidence?

So in clearing, you could say in clarifying the muddy lake, in clearing impurities of mind, it's as if it opens our heart, our mind, our views to another possibility.

For most of us—I want to say all, but one should never say all—for most of us, the way that we live is caught in confusion, in delusion, in not recognizing the way things are accurately. Like when Joseph talked about impermanence the other night. It's not that that's something that's going to become true if we wake up, right? It's already true, but we don't recognize it accurately. And there are many ways that we live in a world of concept, as Andrea was talking about, and views that describe ourselves and describe the world that we don't even know. We just think this is how it is.

And so we tend to consciously notice what fits our view and not notice what doesn't. It's just a limitation on how we can experience the world, and that's what we think is possible for us—it's a vision for us.

The sense of uplift, of inspiration that can come with faith is a kind of opening of the mind, of the heart, past the limitations of the comfortable, to be open to the unknown, to be open to a vision, to a possibility we hadn't even thought of.

This doesn't have to just be in spiritual experience. In 2008, right after President Obama was elected for the first time—that seems like an age ago—I remember the next morning after the election, reporters were interviewing people, because there was, in many quarters, a real excitement, a euphoria almost. This reporter had gone into communities interviewing young African-American women and men, late teens and such. I remember this one young woman they talked to who had clearly had a very difficult life up to that time and hadn't really felt that there was much possibility for her to go to school or to do anything that she wanted to in life—really clearly, as is so often the case, living in a situation where opportunities weren't freely offered.

But she was saying, "Oh, you know, it just gives me so much faith, so much inspiration that if he can be elected president, I can go to school and learn how to be a hairdresser."

It was really so touching. This is really the sense of confidence that comes with faith—the sense of opening past the views we held, for good reason, but thinking there's nothing much possible for me. It's like, oh, there's another vision. And that faith, that opening, that uplifting energy of the mind or heart gives the confidence, the willingness to do.

In terms of talking about faith as one of the spiritual faculties, in terms of our practice here and in our whole life, the Buddha would often begin offering teachings to someone by considering who could hear the Dhamma. But he would realize their mind isn't quite in the uplifted, open place for it. So he would give what he would call the step-by-step talk, graduated teachings.

There's one sutta I like where the Buddha's surrounded by his sangha—nuns, monks, lay people—he's teaching the Dhamma. And there's a poor sick person, actually a leper, a poor wretch of a person as it's described in the suttas. He sees this crowd and thinks, "Oh, maybe there's some food over there. Maybe if I go over there I can get some food." So he goes over, certainly not intending to hear the good Dhamma. But he's just sitting there and thinks, "Oh, there's no food, it's just the Buddha talking, but okay, I'll sit here. Might as well listen."

The Buddha, who could of course tell what was in everyone's mind, looked out in the crowd thinking, "Who here could hear the Dhamma, where it could really go in?" And he sees this guy, Suppabuddha—that was the sick man's name, the poor leper's name—he could hear it. But he sees the mind is kind of closed, not in the uplifted receptive place.

And so he starts with a step-by-step talk, which he always starts by talking about generosity, the qualities of generosity, the qualities of non-harming conduct. He goes through a whole list—renunciation, the dangers of sense pleasures—and then, this is the language: "When he perceived that his mind was ready,

uplifted, clear, then he gave the teachings particular to the Buddhas, of the Four Noble Truths."

This language, to me, describes the quality of saddhā in our heart and mind. Just this sense the mind is uplifted, it's clear, it's flexible, it's open and ready to hear the Dhamma. This quality of faith is really essential to let us open in here, to just be with what's going on.

It's described initially as bright faith—something usually external, first and maybe again and again, triggers this quality of uplift in our mind, in our heart. For each of us, there's been something, and there continue to be things. We can actually use this as a contemplation, consciously contemplate, come back to what is it that can elicit this quality of saddhā in our mind, in our heart.

Like this young woman thinking about President Obama being elected—but then the bright faith isn't about putting the truth onto that person, thinking I need that person to do it for me. What that bright faith offers, whether it's a person who inspires you, or hearing the Dhamma, or reading the Dhamma, whatever it might be for you—it's not about putting the energy onto them, that quality of devotion, although devotion can be an aspect of faith. But it's not giving over the power to anything outside. Rather, it's that external stimulus that elicits that quality of brightness and uplift and openness in our own mind and heart.

This is called bright faith. And as that gives us the energy to do—like maybe it gave that young woman, maybe she really did go to school and learn how to be a hairdresser.

That would be the *viriya*. And then the mindfulness, the determination to do it.

So as we open with bright faith in terms of our Dhamma practice, as we continue to practice, it becomes more and more what's called verified faith. It's not so dependent on that particular external stimulus because we come to know for ourselves, in deeper and deeper ways, the truth of the Dhamma. But even when we start with bright faith, it's not about putting it onto someone else. It's about eliciting this willingness to do.

What the heck is it we're doing? How is it different from wanting? And this is where it gets really interesting to me. Because the faith, the confidence of this wholesome quality of *saddhā*, isn't about getting something we want, or feeling good, or getting the result we want. The confidence is really in the willingness to basically give ourselves wholeheartedly, with awareness, into this moment just as it is. Without holding back. Without having a "so that."

So it's not a willingness to do such that if I do X, Y, Z, in three days I'm going to be a stream-enterer. I mean, our minds might think that. But then we start practicing and that is not the energy of faith—that's the energy of wanting. It feels really different. We'll flip back and forth, but you can really tell: wanting is not inspiring. It gives us energy to do, God knows. How many things have we done in our life that come from wanting? A few, you know. It gives us energy to do, but it's not opening. It's not uplifting. It's narrowing and self-referencing and exhausting. The energy of faith is quite different.

So the willingness to do, to meet this moment with our fullness of presence, with awareness, no matter what this moment is presenting. But there are a couple of different ways that faith might manifest for us, because we're different personalities. Here I want to talk about the sense of devotion, because for some people that really is the manifestation of faith for them.

The Buddha talks about two kinds of followers in the suttas. He talks about Dhamma followers and faith followers, which I think is really interesting. The faith followers—he uses the word *saddhā*, faith—but I want to say, in the way he's talking about it, I would substitute in English "devotion followers," because both types have faith.

The Dhamma followers are disciples in whom the faculty of wisdom, of the five faculties, the discerning faculty, is predominant. They develop the noble path with wisdom in the lead. Faith followers are disciples in whom the faculty of faith is predominant, and they develop the noble path with faith in the lead.

But—and I'm paraphrasing here—a wisdom follower is one who is not an awakened person yet, but someone on the path who has sufficiently gained a reflective acceptance and understanding of the teachings proclaimed by the Tathagata. I think I'm more that type. In my early years, a lot of what I learned and what really inspired me came from reading suttas, from reading a lot of the Buddhist teachings that I would get from Sri Lanka, from the Pali Text Society. Actually, I didn't know anybody else where I was living who knew anything about this, so it was that or nothing. But that saved my life. I would say that was really inspiring to me. It wasn't that I was some awakened being, but reading and hearing the Dhamma in that way, it just made sense and went deeper and deeper. And it inspires faith, that sense of uplift.

A faith follower, the way the Buddha describes it, is one who has sufficient faith in and love for the Tathagata, which is how he described himself. Both of these followers actually have all five faculties, so don't think it's one or the other. All of them have these five faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration or collectedness, and wisdom. And they all balance. So it's not one or the other, but we can see in ourselves maybe a predilection to move in one direction or the other. Not to think there's a right or a wrong—really see that for yourself.

This sense of devotion, I think, can be really appreciated if that's the type, if that's what lights up the energy for you. Look and see for yourself. Remember, maybe it was on the opening night with Bhante, we talked about this meditation, *Buddhānussati*, where you contemplate the qualities of the Buddha. I was saying that in Burma, many of the nuns I know, that's their main practice.

And that practice in itself doesn't—you know, I don't hate it or anything—but it doesn't wake up this quality of energy in me. But being with the nuns who practice it, I can see that for them it does. When they're practicing this, they become quite radiant, filled with joy and incredible energy and commitment and confidence to live their lives as very simple renunciates. And the ones I know, they're living pretty

tough lives—living very simply, taking care of a lot of little orphan girls, or starting schools that they run for poor children, all on dana every month. I mean, really amazing commitment. And I can see the inspiration, the faith that comes, and how that feeds all these five faculties.

And they then become a source of inspiration for me, because what's wonderful is we can catch it from each other. So that particular practice doesn't inspire a lot of faith in me directly. But being with someone whose faith is up—that inspires faith in me. There's a way we can use that with each other.

But we're all different. Last year, I was teaching a retreat in Germany, and a young man came—a young German guy who lived in Shanghai. And he had, just the previous year in Shanghai, had his first introduction to Buddhist practice. I don't think there's so much Buddhist practice really available in China, but he had gone to a five-day retreat with the Pure Land Buddhist school. He said it was in a really ancient monastery with Pure Land Chinese monks, and to him it was so inspiring. He said just the ancient quality—they spent a lot of time together chanting and circumambulating, walking around the statues of the Buddha, chanting. The whole sense, he said, was just so spiritual. It really brought up faith in him.

And that gave him the energy, the confidence, so then he came back home to Germany and did an eight-day Vipassana retreat with us last year—his first real retreat like that. He said that devotional quality really inspired faith in him. But he also said he didn't have any tools at all from that in terms of how to watch his mind or how to practice. So then he found it opened him up to hear the Dhamma, and he really was embracing mindfulness practice and the Four Noble Truths and all of that. That's really kind of how it works.

But there are other people for whom that's not going to be so inspiring. As I said, when I first read the suttas, or when I first heard the First Noble Truth talked about—which, you know, when Bhante mentioned it last night—I found that incredibly inspiring. It's like, "Oh yes, this is how things are." Instead of people saying, "Oh yeah, it's going to be okay, things will be okay, it just gets better and better." But it isn't just getting better and better. "What's the matter? I should be happy. I've got nothing to complain about." And then I heard the First Noble Truth. "Oh yes, that makes total sense." Great faith would come up, and that gives a confidence to practice.

So it can be interesting and helpful for each of us to just look in your own experience and see what inspires you. And I've found for myself, even as I say I'm not the devotional type—maybe that turns out not to be true. Maybe what I'm seeing for myself is that the two qualities of faith follower, devotion follower, and Dhamma follower, wisdom follower—it all ends up coming together one way or another.

So for me, the devotion turns out to be not to a being, not particularly to a sense of the memory of the Buddha, although I'm quite inspired by many of my teachers. The devotion turns out to be a love of awareness itself—a complete confidence, complete love of the awareness of this moment. Which can lead into, when the awareness is more or less pure, an embracing of this moment. Or not. Then you embrace that you're not embracing this moment. But a real sense of confidence in awareness. Confidence in the

Dhamma, that it reveals the truth.

So I'll tell a little story that for me personifies this—I don't know if it works for anyone else. It was maybe, actually it's a long time ago now, fifteen or twenty years, when I first visited the Ramana Ashram in Tiruvannamalai in southern India, in Tamil Nadu. Ramana Maharshi, if you don't know, died in 1951. But he was really considered one of the great awakened beings, one of the saints of India in the last century. He spent all of his life from the time he was sixteen until he died at the base of this small mountain, Arunachala, in this little village of Tiruvannamalai. An ashram grew up around him, and he really, from what one can tell, seemed quite awakened—very inspiring.

So this ashram is still there, and it's very well maintained, very well managed. There's what they call a samadhi—it's a different use of the word than how we use it—which is kind of like the marble tomb where he is buried, with a big building around it. The ashram is there at the base of the mountain, and the mountain is one of the things Ramana would speak of often. He would say, "O Arunachala, you root out the ego of one who meditates on you in your heart."

So it's a sense of really freedom from confusion, from greed, hatred, and delusion.

The ashram honors Ramana, but it's not about mere devotion to him. It's really there to support all the people who come—which is millions of people over the years from all over the world—to wake up themselves. So it's not like a dead place, like a museum. It's really alive, oriented toward awakening.

And I say millions of people come there from all over, so every evening there's a big hall, bigger than this, where all the guests can sit along the side, and the men and women who run the ashram come and do an hour's chanting. You sit and listen—it's one of the things to do. You listen to the chanting, and right behind is the open room with the samadhi, with Ramana's tomb there. Then after the chanting you go to dinner.

The chanting is led on the men's side by the man who's the president of the ashram, who runs the place. And as the chanting is going on, and all through the day, people are walking around circumambulating the tomb. It's something one does when one's there. And watching people do it—all kinds of people, and myself included—you can see, as much as you can tell from looking at someone, all the different ways that people do that.

Some are really showy, prostrating around, and you can tell there's a wanting so much to feel the truth, to wake up. You can just feel this energy. Some people are just walking around chit-chatting, just la la la, and then they go away. Some people are just so grim, trying so hard. So much different stuff.

And I could see that in myself. There were times I'd just be walking around, but there were times I'm like, "I have to really be present so I can wake up." Does that sound like anybody's walking meditation? Right? Just—ugh! And it looks like you're really doing it, but the motivation isn't this upliftingness of faith. It's wanting. And they feel so different when you notice it, but we so easily slide into "Ugh, I gotta wake up." "No, oh no, I spaced out in that moment." "Oh, Ramana, Ramana." What can he do? He's gone. Just like the

Buddha, they're gone. What's here now?

So, all of that. I was watching. And on this particular night, the chanting ended. Every night the president of the ashram would go in, and all the people—two hundred people—you go in, you sit on the floor in rows, and the president and the other people who run the ashram come and ladle out the food. They serve everyone their meal, every night and every lunch.

So he finished the chanting, got up—this very simple man—just got up, very simply walked around the tomb, and went and served the dinner. No huff, no fluff, no big show, no prostrating. Just get up, walk around the samadhi, go serve dinner. Day after day after day, year after year after year.

And to me—of course, I don't know how much is projection, I'm aware of that—but what it really said to me, this is the quality of devotion. Just the simplicity of awareness in this moment. Just the simplicity of: you get up, you walk around the samadhi, and you go serve dinner. To me, that's really the devotion to the everyday simplicity and honesty of awareness.

And that's really what we're cultivating here. Not looking for a better experience, but you get up, you brush your teeth. You feel grumpy, like Winnie said yesterday, or you feel great. It doesn't matter. Just get up, and you notice how things are, and you brush your teeth, and you come and sit. You go wash the pots, you take a walk. You just feel whatever it is. It's the awareness that the faith, the saddhā, gives us the trust, the confidence to really open into. It doesn't matter what's happening, but the saddhā, the faith, gives us the confidence to give ourselves completely to this moment—whatever it might happen to be—with nothing held back.

Here is a quotation from Ayya Khema, the great German nun and Buddhist teacher. She's talking about faith. She says that the willingness to give ourselves to our path wholeheartedly is not a one-time decision. It keeps on deepening. This is like the verified faith. As long as we're still looking for a loophole—a loophole means some way out, looking for some lasting happiness in this world—

Then our commitment to our spiritual path is not complete. This isn't about judging—it's just about looking and seeing. "Okay, I'll open to this moment so that it gets better." You know, all the "I'm being mindful, but it didn't work." How often do we say that? "It didn't work. What am I doing wrong? Because it's supposed to get better." Only when we've realized that there is not another way out will we be ready to really give ourselves to the path.

I don't say that so that you take it as a way to put yourself down—not at all. But more in the sense of seeing. It deepens. It deepens. We don't have the confidence or the trust to just really give ourselves to awareness of whatever's happening when whatever's happening is difficult. Or it so doesn't match the unrecognized view we have of how things are supposed to be. Winnie last night was wonderful when she was describing what the perfect day would be like. And we laugh—ha ha ha, we don't really think that. Yeah, right. We wouldn't admit it, maybe. But when you get up grumpy and everything goes the other

way, it's like, "I'm not giving myself completely to this. No way."

But the confidence, the trust, the faith in awareness—what starts to happen is a shift of motivation from wanting, from somehow looking for experience to affirm ourselves, to confirm ourselves, to give ourselves some sense of importance, of getting somewhere. Don't you want to know you're getting somewhere? This open awareness where you're just floating around, noticing whatever arises, and you're not having any experiences, not getting more clear—doesn't that drive you crazy? Don't you want some proof you're getting somewhere?

But the real surrender: Where do you think you're going to get? Where is there besides this moment? There's nothing else besides this moment. Dōgen Zenji, the great Zen master, said, "If you can't find the truth right where you are, where do you expect to find it?"

So whatever's occurring in this moment—beautiful, difficult, a moment of faith, a moment of aversion, a moment of hearing, a moment of pain—this moment is the Dhamma speaking to us. It's nowhere else. And faith, this uplifted quality of heart and mind, gives us the confidence again to say, "Okay, it's like this right now." Just a kind of surrendering or giving ourselves into this moment, nothing held back—not in order for something better to happen, but because of us right here.

What's really started to shift for me, getting stronger and stronger, is that this devotion or this quality of Dhamma follower starts to be that the trust, the confidence in awareness, in mindfulness, becomes more trustworthy and more interesting than our habit of liking and disliking whatever is occurring. Our habit of getting entranced by aversion and greed and self-stories—those things will still come. But we get more interested in the awareness. It just feels so much more reliable and true and freeing, and always accessible when we remember. Awareness isn't just accessible when pleasant things are happening or when unpleasant things are happening. It's whenever we remember.

So this is the shift from expecting or thinking we know, to simply loving awareness itself—that's my language. Then we don't keep evaluating by the quality of what's happening. And then we can start to see that all of our six sense experiences—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, physical sensations, and then the whole mental realm of thoughts, emotions, moods—those are the six sense experiences. They're just occurring, over and over, across those six doors. All of them, any of them, serves to re-trigger our recognition of awareness. There's nothing outside of it. We don't have to wait for a better experience.

And this gets to be really so wonderful, because you can sit down and be having just the most awful, useless sitting. I know we always tell you no sitting's useless, but don't you feel like some of them are useless? You say, "I'm just sitting here and it's restless and it's foggy and I'm sleepy and what's the point? I might as well just be in bed—it'd be more pleasant, that's for sure. Useless."

And then you come tell us, and we say, "Oh, but there's awareness of fogginess." And you go, "Thanks a lot. I needed you to tell me that." Right. But we mean it. We mean it. And just so you know, if you're on my

interview list, I'm going to keep on saying that the whole time. You don't even have to come because that's what I'm going to tell you.

You tell me something, and I say, "Oh yeah, and there's awareness of that." That's so far out! Because over and over again there will be that shift where you're sitting there foggy, and then—oh, awareness of fogginess. Awareness of fogginess. And this love of awareness will come, just for that moment. You see, awareness doesn't care if it's aware of fogginess or aware of bliss. Awareness isn't better when it's aware of something pleasant. We can be aware of anything.

So just starting with something simple—I had this example written down. I was at home washing a teacup. I'm a little bit attached to my two perfect teacups, I have to say. I don't want to break them. When people stay in my house, I put them up high. I say, "Use anything you want, but not those two teacups." And they say, "We wouldn't dare, we wouldn't touch them."

So I was washing my teacup this one day, very carefully, and then I became aware—I'd been really mindful, mindful of the movements of the teacup, but I wasn't noticing the attitude in the mind. The mindfulness wasn't complete. It was mindfulness with the attitude of wanting. I was being very careful with my movements because I didn't want to break the teacup. Do you get a sense of how we can be mindful *in order to*? That's a sort of mindfulness, but it's not the mindfulness of faith. It's not the vīrya that just dies into what's happening. It was the wanting.

So, okay, there's klesha. There's the torment in the mind of greed that I didn't see. But all of a sudden I became aware of the greed. Our tendency could be, "Oh, I'm not being mindful well enough because there's greed." Okay, that's aversion. But what happens with true mindfulness? "Oh, that's greed. Oh yeah, look at that. That's greed." And then the awareness of greed—the awareness becomes more interesting. It starts to grow and gain its own momentum.

It wasn't like I said, "Oh, I have to really love awareness here." It was more like, "Here's awareness. Oh yeah, that's—oh, that's greed. Oh yeah, greed is like this. That's how greed feels in the body. That's awareness of greed." And then I noticed the next thing, and the mindfulness just starts to get its own momentum again. Anything, everything that occurs can be the trigger back into awareness.

That's why we talk so much about continuity. It's not to gain something. You think you've wasted half the day—like when you were saying if you're not walking, you're wasting half the day. But then you suddenly wake up. You're drinking tea, your seventeenth cup of tea of the day, and it's only ten in the morning. But suddenly you become aware. You feel a sensation. You're drinking the tea. You notice the absolute disgust—"I can't stand another sip of tea. It's disgusting. I'm going to float away." Oh, aversion's like that.

And then you touch it—you palpably feel the awareness. It's like, "Great, here we are again." And that awareness leads to the steadiness of mindfulness. It starts to get its own momentum. That's the concentration. And then the wisdom, the clear seeing, the recognition of what's wholesome, what's

onward-leading, what's not—that's not an act of will. That comes by itself.

So this example I'm making up—the seventeenth cup of tea, the disgusting something, and then, "Oh, I really don't need any more tea right now." And you get up and you go, "I think I'll just do walking meditation." Really with that tone of voice, not with judgment, not with blame. Oh yeah, wisdom sees this is really more supportive of my awakening right now—get up and walk. And you'll see that happening more and more as the retreat goes on. We say it gets a little bit easier to remember to be mindful. In the beginning, at the end of every walking pass, you try to think, "Do I need to go to the bathroom yet? No, not yet, I have to do another one." And after a couple of weeks, you don't even think about it anymore. It's happening naturally.

But notice this. Notice how the faith, the confidence, brings the energy, the willingness to do, and then we start to love the awareness. The mindfulness gets its own momentum. The mind steadies and the wisdom comes, you see more clearly, and that again cycles around and feeds the faith, feeds the uplifting quality. And so it keeps spiraling deeper and deeper. We need that. We need that recommitment, because it does get difficult. It's difficult in the beginning, and it gets difficult in different ways as we go on.

One of the descriptions of viriya, energy, is the quality of mind, of heart, that does not shrink back. To shrink means to pull back from the difficult. So when something difficult happens, there's that uplifting of faith that gives us the courage: "Okay, I can surrender into this moment too, with awareness." Not pulling back, but surrendering into this.

Because it does get difficult in different ways. We have to keep finding that faith again, that recommitment. Stephen Batchelor, once talking about emptiness—emptiness of sense of self, the sense of awakening—said, "Emptiness is not just an experience of oceanic bliss. It is a falling apart of all of our strategies of self-interest, of self-centeredness, and seeming protection. And although it is freeing, at times it also brings up great disconcertion." It feels very uncomfortable, confusing—like being in no man's land, where we're not in the realm of the familiar. We can't quite figure it out the way we're used to doing. And so then, again, we may call on faith to give us the uplift, to give us the energy. This too—not to shrink back.

So I just want to say one last thing: when you're finding yourself at a difficult time, noticing it's hard, when your mind is shrinking back, you can actually consciously use deliberate reflections on what brings up faith and inspiration in your heart and mind. Even though this is a deliberate contemplation, it can be very useful when we feel the energy is really getting lost, when we feel like, "What am I doing this for? I'm picking up and putting down my foot—why? To feel the sensations? Why? Who cares?" You ever have a moment like that? I do, often. Then I'll just do it again because the faith is really natural, and then it goes away. But sometimes we need to call it up.

So look and see for yourself. Think about it: What has inspired you, uplifted you, brought you to this path? There can be different things. For me, often I'll think about the teachers I've had, the people in my life in different ways—they don't have to be Buddhist teachers—but those who have exhibited some quality of

compassion, of wakefulness, that when I think of them, that upliftedness, that energy, that openness, that willingness to do, comes into my heart, into my mind. A sense of gratitude, a sense of inspiration.

Or sometimes we can't find it even in ourselves. What I've found—and this unexpectedly started to occur for me one time when I was on retreat in Burma, during a really difficult retreat, getting quite caught in some heavy mental states—was that just trying to think of my own teachers or what inspired me, it just didn't cut it. I couldn't get there because the heaviness of the mental state was too strong. But then, in a situation like this, because we catch it from each other, we can actually use the external surroundings, use the sense of sangha. There's no way we're doing this in isolation. You may wish you were in more isolation, but we're not in isolation. And we really support one another.

That is one of the meanings of Sangha.

So I noticed on this retreat in Burma how well the people who were running the retreat center were taking care of us all—so many yogis from Burma and all different countries. The great generosity and metta with which the people who were working in the kitchen would do everything they could to satisfy people's little needs, the amount of care and kindness and metta that was just all around supporting me. And that actually uplifted my mind and heart, brought back faith, brought back openness.

So I would say sometimes if you're here and feeling that way, and you notice another fellow meditator—sometimes you can just feel that they're in the flow. Of course, we never really know. But as Joseph or someone was saying, you can tell when someone's just spacing out, and you can tell when someone's really there in that moment. And you think, "Oh, right. There really is a point to this." It can brighten our mind and heart.

Or I look around and notice the great generosity and metta from the staff. The care that goes into—just look at the flower arrangements. When one is dying, they put up some new beautiful arrangements. Somebody put great metta and generosity into that. Just look around and let it in. It doesn't take much. Because it then elicits that quality in our own mind and heart. And then again, there's the energy to take the next step, to notice the next thing, to bring awareness to this sense of shame or fear or aversion.

And I'm not just making this up as something I thought was a good idea. The Buddha also talks about it. There's one sutta actually given to nuns. Ananda is talking to nuns and then he and the Buddha are talking together. I'm going to paraphrase it a bit.

The Buddha is saying, "Here a nun, a monk abides"—you may recognize this phrase—"contemplating the body in the body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful." Do you remember Andrea talking about that phrase? He's saying they're just in the four foundations, leading away from the unhappiness that comes from wanting the things of the world. And as one is abiding, contemplating the four foundations of mindfulness, it could happen that a bodily sensation arises, a distress, or a mental sluggishness, or a mental distress. So the Buddha is saying this could arise—something that scatters the mind, that gets us

confused. He recognizes this happens.

And so he says: you're practicing, a bodily distress, a mental sluggishness, a mental distress arises, and your mind gets completely scattered and lost. At that time, the nun, the monk, can direct her mind to some inspiring image. The word is *image*. And he gives the example of using the image of the Buddha. But I'm going to substitute here for whatever elicits faith in you. You can actually consciously—you're completely scattered, you're lost—it's one way that we can use metta, as Winnie was talking about. Metta for many people, just the quality of metta, inspires and opens the mind and heart. Or it can be contemplating or just bringing up some inspiring person, inspiring teacher, some of the examples I gave—but really to contemplate what brings up faith in you.

So do this for some time, and as this happens, you start to see that the sluggishness recedes, the distress recedes. He says happiness is born. From this happiness, from this joyful mind, the body relaxes. A relaxed body feels content. Just in case you thought we were making up this relaxation stuff—this is the Buddha. Joyful mind relaxes the body. A relaxed body feels content. The mind of one content becomes collected.

She then can reflect: "The purpose for which I directed my attention to an inspiring recollection has been served, so I can withdraw my attention from that." And that's called directed meditation. And then I just withdraw my attention from that and don't direct the mind to anything in particular. Just notice whatever's arising. Back to our mindfulness practice.

So this is from the Buddha. Using the sense of faith, and then it leads through all the five faculties to wisdom and keeps on spiraling deeper into faith.

I think that's enough. Let's just sit quietly for a moment.

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