Balancing The Five Spiritual Faculties

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 57:38

The art of this meditation practice that we're doing together here is really one of balancing. There are all kinds of different balances we could talk about, and we will as the retreat goes on. What I want to talk about tonight is five specific qualities of energy—a different five from the five hindrances. These ones are hopefully more on the positive side, if you want to make such a distinction.

These are five qualities of mind, mental states really, that we all experience on an ongoing basis anyway, but that develop strongly as our practice grows and continues. As we continue to practice, we can learn to recognize each of these mental states and learn how to bring them into balance.

It's been an incredibly useful tool for me in my own practice to learn that what I think is the practice going wrong—in other words, it's not the way I like it in this moment, so definitely it's not working—to start to see that one way of looking at that is not that I'm bad, I'm wrong, I'm useless, but that these five energies are out of balance. It's not personal. And it makes it much easier, and actually interesting, to investigate: How can I bring these together? What's low? What's out of balance? How to bring it back into balance?

I think it was Trungpa Rinpoche who said once that the way we come to balance is by falling out of balance. That's how we notice it and come back to balance. So it's not such a big tragedy when things get a little out of balance.

These five mental states, these five qualities, are faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. I'd like to speak in an introductory way about each of these tonight. When I'm talking about them, if possible, rather than just intellectually listening or thinking about them, see if you can get a feel in your own experience for each of these mental states, because they're all ones we're familiar with. Learning to recognize when they're present, when they're absent.

Faith, the first quality—these are called the five spiritual faculties, by the way, if you like list names. A definition that I particularly like for faith is "the drive towards that which cannot be described." It puts you right in the middle of what faith is about. It's about opening into the unknown. Sometimes we tend to think of faith as being based on some kind of knowledge—if we have a certain knowledge or we know the outcome, then we'll have faith in it. But it's just the reverse.

There are two aspects of faith that I'd like to talk about. First, knowing that faith is intuitive; it has nothing to do with intellectual rational knowledge, which is why it's so frustrating for our minds. But we all have experiences of faith. And I would say for everyone here, to some degree quite strongly, or you wouldn't have come here in the first place, and you definitely wouldn't still be here.

They talk about how when faith first arises in the mind, it's called bright faith. You can see why, because it has this quality of brightness, of energizing, of clarity. This is the kind of faith that's usually inspired in us—either hearing the Dhamma, meeting someone, or hearing someone that you find very inspirational. For instance, I get that from the Dalai Lama, or from some of my teachers. Just this sense of brightness and confidence and willingness. I get it often from talking with yogis in interviews, just seeing someone lighting up from touching the truth. And it doesn't mean they're having a pleasant experience either. But often I'll come out of an interview feeling this bright faith, this real sense of confidence.

It's what gets us going. It's really what brings most of us to this practice, or any other practice, in the beginning—a real sense of lighting up. And it's wonderful. It's also impermanent, as is everything. It wavers. Usually on a retreat, for me about the second day, when you start to hit the hindrances, almost always my mind says, "Oh no, I can't believe I did this to myself again. What am I doing here?" And for most people, at some point when we hit the wall, whatever that happens to be, the bright faith really starts to flicker. It's not sustaining, because bright faith is basically aroused from an outside source.

But as we continue to be with our own experience, what develops that is more sustaining than bright faith is what we could call verified faith—verified because it's not arising from an outer inspiration but is verified through our own immediate experience.

This is really what our mindfulness practice allows us to discover—through our moment-to-moment willingness to simply be with what is happening right now, with the truth of what this moment is presenting. This allows for intuitive understanding to arise: understanding into the nature of our mind and body, perhaps into impermanence, into the fact that there is no solid, unchanging self here. Faith that in being willing to open to and explore something difficult, it can transform into a completely different and unexpected experience. Faith in all kinds of areas of wisdom—all these things are wisdom, which is really the fifth faculty—but when these come from our own experience, it's a much deeper, more sustaining quality of faith than this bright faith that gets us started and gives us energy.

Really, the Buddha's teaching is based on this verified faith. It's one of the things that always made me trust the Buddha's teaching more than a lot of others. There's one sutta that we love in the West. In the East, they don't need it so much. But in the West, it's kind of our favorite—the one where he says, "Don't believe anything just because I say so. Don't do it because anyone else tells you to. But try this and see for yourself. What are the results? Does it lead to less suffering? Does it lead to freedom?" So even though it takes an initial kind of bright faith—even blind faith—it's very much that we need to verify it through our own experience. And this is what the Buddha talked about. From this faith comes a great deal of confidence, a great deal of energy.

I want to talk about one other aspect of faith that has been very alive for me in my practice the last few years. It's one aspect of faith, really the quality of trust. I see trust as the willingness to connect with, to simply be with the truth of this moment. Really, the trust is the willingness, the ability to take refuge in

this moment, whatever it happens to be that this moment is presenting. It's also a kind of innocent, childlike quality, because it's willing to take refuge without having any guarantees, without having any outcome promised—just simply without knowing. And that's how life is. You never know what's going to happen in the next moment.

My favorite way of describing it comes from one teacher who calls it radical acceptance. He says, "Radical acceptance is radical acknowledgement of the presence of truth at this very moment. The only thing to do is to do nothing but accept truth in all things, at all times, in all forms, in all ways. To let go, to accept, it is necessary only to give up your fears." Only. These guys always make it sound so easy. But really that's the quality of trust—to accept truth in all forms in this moment.

And so right now, today, what have we been unwilling to accept? What have we been resisting, unwilling to accept as truth in this moment? This can be very subtle. The mind is very tricky in this way. And the fears—it's necessary only to give up your fears—the fears also can be very subtle, so that we hardly notice they're there.

I see it often myself in my own practice, in my life. It's really no different. For example, I remember one time I was going through a wave of deep grief and sadness. It was lasting days and days and days. And I felt I was being very present with it, very mindful with it, noting it, allowing it, accepting it. But really, somewhere quiet in the background was the sense, "You know, if I was doing this right, this wouldn't be happening." And no matter how subtle a thought that is, what it's coming from is not accepting. Somehow that isn't okay as truth in this moment.

And when I really look at it, most often that fear isn't so much about what's happening right now, but more the fear of, "If I really let go into this, then what will happen? Then it will really overwhelm me. Then it will get worse." And then the whole fountain opens up. So it's really interesting just to notice that point—because when we're not moving, opening into the unknown in that way, we're often shut down through fear. And fear is almost always of something that isn't actually happening yet.

So trust is this kind of radical acceptance that what is now is the truth in this moment.

There's nowhere else to go. It might be really unpleasant, but there's a sense of trust that I can take refuge in that. It too is a gateway, a doorway to understanding.

And it is scary at times when we are really living in that space where we know we just don't know what's going to happen in the next instant. We really don't know what the next thing is that's going to arise in our experience. You think you're going to take another breath, but suddenly there's this shooting pain in your knee that wasn't planned. When we walk out of this room, we have no idea. It doesn't mean we don't make plans, but really living in that space where we know we don't know—it's scary.

But it can also be incredibly freeing. It opens the doorway to so much energy and possibilities. Because when I'm holding back, afraid, wanting to know what's going to happen next, so much of my energy goes

into trying to control, trying to organize, trying to manage what's uncontrollable in the first place. It's a futile tying up of energy.

But still, we like to know. We want to have some basis of knowledge. And it's kind of frustrating when we keep looking for more knowledge and more security, and instead what we find is greater and greater mystery. The more we look, the less we know. I have to say, the more I've practiced, every time I come out of a long period of practice, I really don't know anything. I know even less than I thought I knew the last time.

I came across a science article in the New York Times. The largest galaxy ever detected—the discovery was announced last week—includes more than 100 trillion stars and measures more than 6 million light years in diameter. This galaxy is 60 times the size of our own Milky Way. Now, this new galaxy is located in the center of an even larger clump, a cluster of about a thousand galaxies called Abel 2029. But then they said that further study will provide clues to the role played by a mysterious substance called dark matter. Since there doesn't appear to be enough ordinary matter in the universe to account for the huge gravitational forces that would seem necessary to cause all these clumpings of galaxies, they think it's caused by this dark matter. According to the prevailing wisdom of scientists, some 99% of the universe consists of this missing mass. Which means that what is generally thought of as astronomy actually concerns only a tiny subset of particles that happen to be detectable by human nervous systems.

So we just don't know. And when we stop trying to know so hard, it's really wonderful, because what I find happens is we can open up to the wonder of things. I mean, it's wonderful that 99% of the universe is some unknown substance. It's really amazing. Who can explain just the wonder of a simple thing like a baby bird? Or why are robin's eggs blue? Or what makes it rain? You can say the scientists can explain it, but you don't really know. These things are wonderful. And that sense of awe, that sense of playing in the beauty and wonder of it all, is really what opens up to us when we can just be with what is in this moment, when we can begin to move from this space of trust.

Krishnamurti said, "To seek the truth is to deny it." We simply just be the truth in this moment. This practice for me has been wonderful that way, because no matter how difficult a particular experience might be, no matter how overwhelming, how much we're caught in fear and resistance—and we do get caught, and we are caught, and it can be for days—at some point, there can be just that one moment of: *Ah , all right. This is how it is. I don't have any idea what's going to come out of it. It's okay. This is just what is.* That moment of trust—that's a moment of faith. It's really where wisdom arises from. And it's almost as if this is a practice of trust, and it grows the more we do this meditation. It's really quite lovely.

So you might notice something that we often do in practice which is sort of the opposite of trust. I call it manipulating meditation. When you find yourself trying to recreate a certain state of mind, a certain physical state that you've had, a certain really high concentrated state where you thought, "Now this is it, now I'm doing it right." And you find yourself going back to the same place to walk, at the same time of

day, or holding your hands the same way. There are all kinds of ways we can get into these little routines, almost like magical routines, trying to recreate what we've decided is the right way for things to be. And if it happens, then we think, "Oh, I've got so much faith." And if it doesn't happen, we feel really frustrated. This is not trust. This is not faith. This is basically craving and manipulation.

But notice when you catch yourself doing it—we all do—what's the state of mind that's being fostered in that state? And often, for myself, this can be quite subtle: a feeling of either fear, dissatisfaction, or neediness. The sense that somehow what's happening now isn't okay and I've got to make it different. And then when we see that and again just say, "Okay, sleepiness, this is what is," and there's a surrendering to that—again, this trust and confidence grows.

So this faculty of faith gives us a great deal of confidence that builds our capacity to be with, to face whatever it is that's arising in our experience in this moment. And that confidence leads into the next faculty, which is that of energy. Sometimes I've heard it called "willingness to do," of a sort. Energy—sometimes I like to call it joyful effort, because it's not this grim, determined "I'm going to do this no matter what." That has energy in it, but it's not balanced. So it's a kind of joyful effort and interest. And as you can see from your own experience, it's a vital quality to continue in this practice at all. No question. This sitting and walking all day with alertness takes an incredible amount of energy. People who haven't done it can't believe how much effort and energy it takes just to sit and walk slowly all day. But it takes a lot. It's really, in a way, the root of our practice.

It's really important to be aware of energy as an impersonal mental state or force. I myself find it so easy to identify with especially low energy as being me, being a bad yogi, being my fault. But if you just start to notice, energy always ebbs and flows. There are always roller coasters of energy. As with every other mental state, nothing is static. Everything changes. When the energy is low, even with the best intentions, the practice just starts to drag on and drag on. The enthusiasm wanes. It can become kind of tedious—I don't know if any of you have experienced this. The ideas start to come up almost inevitably: "Ah, I should be doing something else. I'm not suited for this. This is the wrong time." Whatever. And it's really easy to interpret it as "I'm not doing this right." But that's just not the case.

Begin to notice the reverse. It took me a while to discover that when I was feeling—or am feeling—really present and fulfilled in my meditation practice, really interested in what's going on, it's not necessarily that what's going on is really cosmic. It's that the quality of energy is strong and balanced, so that I'm pretty connected, paying attention, interested in what's happening. What's happening could be total dukkha. But when the energy is balanced and present, it's okay. There's not this kind of self-flagellation: "You should be doing it better, you should be doing it better."

Balanced energy and effort is, I think, one of the most ongoing dances that we work with in our lives and in this practice. These faculties are present in our lives outside of formal meditation practice as well. For energy to be balanced, it really comes from inside ourselves, from within our own hearts, and actually

springs from a joyful, interested heart. It's true that sometimes we have to just make a commitment and do it. There are times when the energy is low and we have to just keep going. But when it's really flowing, when it's balanced, it comes from an inner joy and interest.

And if that dies and we're too much just trying to impose an outer form on ourselves—for example, just walking slow, incredibly slow, no matter what's going on, not paying any attention to the conditions within or without—often that is such an effort that the heart and mind can start to wither. When it's no longer springing from inside, everything can get really dull, really dry. Sometimes you need to check in and see what's going on.

I remember one time in my practice it was like that for about two weeks, which is really long for me for it to feel that way. And finally I came to this point. I was coming up these stairs—I always walked in a certain hallway—and I said to myself, and really meant it, "If someone else is walking there, I'm leaving the retreat and going home." Of course, I live two doors away, so I don't know if I'd really have gotten away. Luckily, no one was walking there.

But that's the kind of state it can reach when the energy is out of bounds and becomes dull and dry and forced.

When that's happening, it's tricky, because our mind can tend to go two ways. One is like, "Okay, forget it. It's not springing from inner joy. I'm just going to kick back and read and walk and sketch until I feel like doing it again." I wouldn't really advocate this, especially as the first thought that arises in the mind. It's really true that when the energy is falling down low and it's feeling dry, usually what's happening at that point is difficult. That doesn't mean we should just stop.

It takes a delicate balance. But if we're willing to just gently—not forcing, but gently—say, "Okay, it's dull, it's dry now, but I'll just keep doing it." Not out of strain, but just in a gentle, loving way. Keep doing the sitting, keep doing the walking, and let it be just as it is. That willingness to continue.

It's like Sayadaw U Pandita uses the image of polishing a brass mirror. At first you can't see anything. You just polish and polish and polish, and it gets brighter and brighter until you can see really clearly. It's not like you're pushing your fist through the metal. You're just gently being willing to be sustained and continuous.

But don't confuse not quitting—don't confuse continuing in this gentle way—with trying to make things different. It's not that at all.

And that's the other place. I think it's the place where most of us get really hung up in an imbalance of energy. The tendency for so many of us, when something difficult begins to happen, as I said earlier, is to interpret, "This means I'm doing something wrong. This shouldn't be happening." We're just so conditioned that pleasant is right and unpleasant is wrong. So as soon as it gets unpleasant, it must be wrong.

When that happens, for many people—I know I see it in myself—the more difficult it gets, the more I interpret it as wrong, and that starts to mean that *I'm* wrong, *I'm* bad. It gets into a whole feedback loop of self-judgment and criticism and negation.

I remember once I was doing walking and noting my thoughts, and I realized I was in an unbelievable state of self-judgment and hatred. I'd gone all the way back to third grade—everything I had done wrong, the people I had offended. It was really heavy. "How did I get here?" And I just said, okay. I tuned in, and what was happening really was a pain in my big toe. That's all. Which was unpleasant. I hadn't really noticed that. But I had judged it and then turned it around that it shouldn't be happening and gone into this whole story of self-hatred.

That can happen when you're in a long, extended period of low energy. It can happen really strongly. And because the energy's low, it's also harder to notice that that's what's happening. We start to believe it.

From that space, rather than giving up, the other extreme is, "No matter what I do, it isn't enough. No matter how hard I try, I'm not trying hard enough." And we drive and we push and we get grim, and we say, "I'm sitting with this no matter what," and grit our teeth. Literally, people sit and sweat is pouring off them and they're shaking, and they finally move, and they come in feeling defeated—their practice is no good because they moved after an hour and a half of torment.

This is not balanced energy either. Grim, heavy determination does not equal balanced energy. It's not the same thing.

So while we don't want to just automatically give up, it also isn't helpful to swing the other way and push our way through no matter how painful and overwhelming an experience might be. The mind and heart just wither when we stay pounding through a difficult experience, whether it's physical pain, emotional pain, or psychological pain. Yes, we want to acknowledge, we want to be present—but not with this grim driving. This is not balanced energy either.

So if you're finding that the effort arising in your practice—look at it and see: Is it the effort to change something? Is it the effort to make things be different or to make something happen? Is there some expectation there? Almost certainly it's an unbalanced quality of effort, and it leads to frustration and tenseness and difficulty.

When you find that you're really lost in this flip side of unbalanced energy—this heavy, grim pushing—the mind is judging. And at that time, sometimes you just can't clearly evaluate what the quality of energy is.

I know when my mind is lost in self-judging, any evaluation I try to make is colored by that judgment. No matter how you try to evaluate the quality of effort, that mind is going to come in and say, "You're not doing it good enough, you're not trying hard enough, you're a wimp, you're a coward." You can't trust it in those moments.

One thing I have found helpful when you're feeling lost in the heaviness of some overwhelmingly difficult, fearful experience is some of what Michelle was talking about last night—to deliberately bring up what Thich Nhat Hanh called "seeds of joy."

I'll read some things Thich Nhat Hanh wrote. He said, "Most of us ask the question, what is wrong? We forget to ask what is right. There are many things that are not wrong. When you focus your attention only on what is wrong, things can get a lot worse. Therefore, it's wise to be aware of your capacity to enjoy peace, happiness, joy—your capacity to be in touch with what is refreshing and healing in the present moment. During the war in Vietnam, we were so busy helping the wounded that we sometimes forgot to smell the flowers. Night has a very pleasant smell, especially in the country. But we would forget to pay attention to the smells of mint, coriander, thyme, and sage. So I would mention these to the social workers and peace workers so they would be in touch with them. Each of us has moments of difficulty. When at times we are not able to deal with them, we can ask our seeds of joy to come up. In this way we can counterbalance the suffering."

Sometimes that's the most skillful thing to do in our practice. There's something the Buddha talked about as skillful avoidance. It's not that, "Oh no, I'm never going to look at this again—anything not to know that this fear is present." But it's knowing that we're grim, that we're overwhelmed, and just finding a simple way to bring up our own seeds of joy.

It could just be shifting the focus of attention to hearing—it's a very spacious field of attention. For me, when I am on an intensive retreat doing vipassana, I tend hardly to go outside. I used to, when I'd get like that, just walk out on the fire escape on the second floor of the Catskills for four minutes. Just that little bit—not noting for four minutes—just opening up to the sky and the tree that's there. And that would be so refreshing to my heart, to my mind. Just bringing in a sense of softness.

It might be doing metta or compassion for yourself or for others. It might be deliberate reflections—any of the ways Michelle talked about last night of cultivating joy. At times, a skillful backing off is the most helpful and powerful way to allow the process to continue in its own way. Again, the difficult situation arises, but there's more balance, more freshness of energy. There's not this withering of the mind.

So just play with this in yourself. There's no rule of thumb. It's really about being aware: What's the quality of energy? What's the quality of mind in this moment? And as the energy continues to become more steady—and it does, it still fluctuates, but it becomes more steady as we go on—this is what strengthens the quality of mindfulness.

I'm not going to say a lot about mindfulness because I think Steve's going to talk about it tomorrow night. But obviously mindfulness is kind of the core tool of this practice. Mindfulness is sometimes translated as "observing power"—that non-coercive, non-violent quality of attention, knowing what's happening clearly, the mind connecting with the experience without hesitating, knowing it just as it is, without all the concepts and interpretations.

Knowing pressure as pressure. Not the whole story about how this pressure means I'm so rigid, which means I'm such an uptight person, and how come I acted like that back in the third grade, and on and on and on. Pressure as pressure. It's unpleasant. Maybe there's aversion. Mindfulness is just connecting with what's happening as it is.

Alert, clear seeing, yet also relaxed—again, not that tension.

This mindfulness is so powerful because in the moment of true mindfulness, really connecting with knowing what's arising just as it is, we're not clouded by confusion, by aversion or anger, by greed. There's just this clear knowing, and it's from this clear knowing that deep wisdom arises. Each moment of mindfulness is very powerful.

You can see how balanced energy and attention leads to this balance of mindfulness. I have a little story that to me was a good example of it. I was in a game reserve in South Africa where you drive through and look for all these animals. But it wasn't one of those ones with wide plains where you can see ten miles off. It was all jungly and thickets and overgrown. So you'd drive really, really slowly on these roads and just peer through all the undergrowth and the tall grass looking for lions and giraffes and elephants and everything.

When we started, we were all excited and looking specifically for elephants, giraffes, lions. A lot of energy, a lot of interest, but it was really tight—looking for, you know, very tense. And we would see some things, but we didn't actually see elephants and giraffes and lions. After a while, because you do this all day for days, just drive around on these roads, eventually I got quite tired. I just couldn't stay that tense, and also frustrated because I wasn't seeing what I wanted to see. That's the quality of energy when we're just too tight, too expecting.

So then I just said, okay, forget it, and lay back and just cruised in the car, spacing out, not really paying much attention at all. And then the energy came back again, and I just quit looking for anything and started appreciating—oh, the grass is really nice. Look at the dew on it from the morning. I was really appreciating the freshness and being quite alert and present with just what was, without looking for lions and giraffes and elephants and everything.

It was really interesting because I started to see very subtle things that I would never have noticed, that I didn't notice at all when I was looking so tightly. I remember the first thing I saw—I was just looking at the grass and I saw a baboon up in a tree. It was almost exactly the same color as the tree. I never would have noticed it when I was looking so hard for something. But just being relaxed and present with what is, things stood out very clearly. And it was also much more enjoyable. I was just very appreciative of whatever was presenting itself.

That really felt to me like the balance of energy that leads to mindfulness, where it's just connecting with what's right there in a very clear way. And when we're content with what is like that, life is really so much

more enjoyable. It's so much easier than wishing everything was different. I don't know why it's so hard to live like that.

So, as I say, each moment of mindfulness is a powerful moment. It's not going to feel powerful, like things going off, but it's a strong moment. And it kind of builds moment by moment, and it leads to a strengthening of concentration, which is this fourth faculty. Concentration becomes strong, becomes well established through this continuity of mindfulness.

By concentration, I mean just feeling it in your mind. We have all these ideas about what concentration is, but it's really that quality in one moment. Just think of it in one moment. Don't try and stretch it out over time. It's that quality in one moment of how the mind, the attention, sticks to the object—whatever's happening, the breath, the sensation, the motion. It sticks to that object steadily, without a lot of fluttering, without a lot of unsteadiness. Just pain in the knee, knowing it. Rising, knowing it.

Concentration has the function of being a unifying force, a gathering force. Usually the mind, our energy, is dispersed and scattered all over the place. In a moment of concentration, it's all brought together. It's unified in this one particular experience. It's amazing how powerful, how much strength there is in the mind when it is all unified in this way. This unification, this feeling of non-fragmentation, leads to a very deep sense of peace. We have contentment. Strong states of happiness come about through periods of one-pointed concentration. It's really so lovely when our mind and energy is not flying off in ten million different directions at once.

Part of that's what we see when we first sit down and in the first few days of a retreat. Part of why it's so difficult is that what we're starting to consciously experience is just how scattered the energy is—the physical and mental energy. In our daily life, we couldn't believe how scattered it really is until we try to say, okay, just stay with the breath, and we see how incredibly difficult that is. And how joyful it can be.

You tell someone, "I was with two breaths – it was so wonderful, I felt so happy!" And it doesn't make sense to somebody who hasn't tried it. But it's that sense of non-fragmentation that's so lovely.

In working with this form of vipassana, we're not cultivating one-pointed concentration or samadhi practice in that way. Rather, we're developing a steadiness of attention, a concentration that grows on objects that come and go, come and go, come and go. But in each moment that there's a real connecting with what's happening, knowing it clearly – that's the mindfulness. With this sticking quality, this non-fluttering – that's the moment of concentration.

I know I used to get all bent out of shape. I'd go into an interview and say, "I'm not concentrating." I had some idea of what concentration meant over a whole day – my mind was never supposed to wander, never supposed to do anything except go to the breath and stay there. And the most helpful advice I ever got was: forget all the rest of it. Just frame this one moment. In this one moment, whatever is predominant – the breath, the lifting of the foot, tingling, it doesn't matter what – is there a sense of the mind really

connecting with that experience and sticking there? Not kind of vaguely noticing it, not kind of pushing past it, but really connecting and sticking there. Then that's concentration growing.

And you also will begin to see, as concentration does develop over these days – and there's no way it can't, sitting here like this – we'll still fall out of balance. We'll still get scattered. But what happens is that, quite naturally, the restabilization does not take as long, and it happens more naturally. Where something would blow me out of the water for three days, then it might take one day. Or it might be three hours. Notice that. Because often we tend to say, "Oh no, this again – it threw me off again," and we forget that a little while ago it would have been three days of hell instead of half an hour. We still focus on the difficult. But notice that we come back to balance sooner and more naturally. And again, you can't force concentration any more than you can force mindfulness or force effort. It also arises out of this moment-by-moment attention, and really out of a rest and ease and joy in our being, not from forcing.

Now, quite naturally as these four factors I've talked about – faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration – all develop through this practice, arising out of that, quite by itself, is insight or wisdom. Really, that's the point of this practice. It's a wisdom practice, a practice of insight. As I said in the beginning: intuitive understanding through our own experience of the nature of life, of who and what we really are, of what's true about our experience. And that can only come from being with our experience, allowing ourselves to know it as it is, without all this trying to filter it and make it different and explain it so that it fits our preconceived notions.

When with mindfulness we're able to simply be with what is, then there's a chance – oh, that's what's really going on! Of course I never saw it before. As long as I persist in thinking I'm a solid, unchanging body and I can't let go of that concept long enough to just feel vibrating, then that's going to be my experience of the world. Through the willingness to be with sensation, whatever it is, all of a sudden there's a moment where – wait a minute, there's nothing solid here. And that's not a concept. That's the experience in the moment. These kinds of moments arise over and over. That's the arising of wisdom. Oh, things really are impermanent. There really isn't a substantial self hanging around here.

And what's so magical, really, is that this unfolds by itself through such a simple process as sitting, walking, washing dishes – whatever you're doing – and simply being with things as they are. We don't need any kind of fancy special subject to be paying attention to. Anything will serve.

This is from Thich Nhat Hanh: "The world reveals itself even when the eyes are closed. The world is neither inner nor outer. It is vital and complete in any object of contemplation – the breath, the tip of the nose, or anything as tiny as a speck of dust or as huge as a mountain. Whatever it is, it is not fragmented from ultimate reality. In fact, it contains the vast totality of reality."

Anything.

And so as this intuitive wisdom continues to develop, again it strengthens our faith. Faith becomes more

verified, and it kind of comes full circle.

Just a tiny bit about balancing these qualities. In your practice, you can see that the quality of concentration and the faculty of energy balance each other. When they're out of balance—like more energy, too much energy in relationship to the concentration—the mind is all scattered, can't really land on an object. You have a lot of energy; restlessness, in other words, is what develops. It can be helpful sometimes to be spacious, as I was saying this morning in answer to the question. Sometimes if there's been enough steadiness previously, it helps to actually simplify what's going on. It's like too much energy—pinpoint your attention. Just pinpoint it on the breath, or pinpoint it on one part of the foot as you walk. Take fewer objects to pay attention to, because having a lot of things to pay attention to just kind of gets the energy going more.

When there's a deficiency of energy and actually more concentration, we tend to think you can never have too much concentration. But you can have too much in relationship to energy. You can get into this kind of nice space. The mind is calm. You're pretty much on the breath or something. You know what's happening. It's fairly pleasant. It's just going along. And it starts to get really drifty. It's easy to think, "Oh, this is a nice state of concentration." But pretty soon it just turns into a nice state of torpor.

So to notice at that point: it's comfortable, but it's not so helpful. Just bring in a little bit of energy. Again, you can note very clearly, like when you're sleepy—note clearly and steadily. You can try to be very precise in aiming and connecting with the breath, with the sensation, with whatever's happening. If it's really dull, you can add a touch point, a feeling of some touching point in your body between breaths—like your buttocks or your hands touching together—because adding another thing to pay attention to takes more effort, and more effort brings in more energy.

And it's a continual adjustment. Nothing is static. The forces are always shifting back and forth. So it just requires mindfulness to notice. And none of this is about judging. It's not like, "Oh, I'm so sleepy, I'm so lazy." It's, "Ah! The energy's a little low. The concentration's stronger." It's taken such a huge weight off of me to be able to look at it that way instead of it always being my fault somehow.

Wisdom is balanced with faith. And it's interesting because they say when there's an imbalance of faith and wisdom—when the wisdom is stronger—what tends to happen is it turns into analytical thinking. Notice how you can have an insight, some deep seeing into something that just arises. And it's not a thought like, "Oh yeah, everything's vibration," or "Oh, that's what this pattern of self-judging is about." It's just a knowing in the moment. And then there's an excitement and we start thinking about it. "Wow, that's really fantastic. Wait till I get home. Wait till I tell everybody. Now I really understand the Dharma." And you start giving talks in your mind.

This is really like an imbalance of wisdom. There's not the faith that gives the energy to do, to just say, "Okay, but keep practicing. What's happening right now? Thinking." That's the faith, the energy to do. Without that, the wisdom quality just takes off and we end up in analytical thinking, and it can even end

up in skeptical doubt.

The other side is probably more obvious.

When there's a lot of faith but not much wisdom, we can become blind. We put faith in all kinds of inappropriate places and people. Someone told me once about her teacher, "I'd jump off a cliff if he told me to." You have to find the balance for yourself, but too much faith without the counterbalance of wisdom can lead to excessive zeal. "Yes, yes, I understand, I'll do anything, anything"—but there's not the counterbalance of real understanding.

I was talking with a friend who lives in Cambridge about how to deal with walking alone at night in the city. She said she used to have this excess of faith where she thought, "The Dharma will protect me," no matter what, and wouldn't take care. Yes, the Dharma will protect you if you also use some wisdom. You don't walk at midnight into a group of five men hiding in the shadows. You cross the street. And that's not acting from fear. That's simply seeing what the situation is and acting appropriately. Balance of faith and wisdom.

We need all of these factors. Mindfulness is what helps us balance all of them. You can't have too much mindfulness. And it takes mindfulness to even notice that the other factors are out of balance.

As we continue in our practice, in our lives, these qualities strengthen—not just in retreat, but in our daily living. They really work together. When you come to sit again, you'll find that your practice starts out more balanced and stronger. These qualities become much more accessible. We become more familiar with them.

I want to end with a little poem by Kalu Rinpoche, a wonderful Tibetan teacher:

When you practice the Dharma, the clouds of sorrow will drift away and the sun of wisdom and joy will be shining in the clear sky of your mind.

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