# Faith (Saddhā)

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 50:09

I'd like to talk this evening on the subject of faith, and I'd like to introduce it by a particular angle, which is the purification of mind.

One of the Buddha's statements summed up his teachings in this way. He said: "Help others when you can. Don't harm living beings and purify the mind. This is the teaching of all the Buddhas." It's very simple, really.

One of the main commentarial texts in our tradition is a book called the Visuddhimagga. That title translated literally means "the path of purification." And so that is really what we're embarked on in the practice—the path of purification. We might ask, well, what is it that is supposed to be purified? What is it that needs to be refined?

There's a cartoon that I like that sort of points to our human dilemma. It shows a human being on the edge of a lake, and a series of creatures have evolved from the lake. There's a tadpole crawling right out of the lake on the sand, and the thought bubble in the tadpole's mind is: "eat, survive, reproduce." The next creature crawling up out of the lake is a lizard, and the thought bubble out of the lizard's mind is: "eat, survive, reproduce." The next creature is a bird with the same thought bubble. Then there's a monkey—"eat, survive, reproduce." Then there's a human being standing there, and the human being goes: "Hmm, I wonder what it's all about."

This may be our question when we come to sit. What are all these strong and seemingly primordial forces that are stirring within our being when we come to our meditation cushion or our walking space and just plan to be calm?

The Buddha talked about three fundamental forces in the mind that cause difficulty, that cause unhappiness. He said that these three root tendencies are really the cause of all the other unhappy states. These are our tendencies—the mind's tendency to greed, to wanting more than we need; to aversion, to the dislike of our experience; and to delusion or ignorance, the tendency not to see clearly the way things are.

We can take a look at our practice over these two days and we may, if we look closely, be able to see the traces of one or two of these tendencies of mind.

This inclination of wanting comes so often. Did you find yourself on your cushion today ever wanting to be somewhere else? Wanting to experience something else? Often a desire comes for something more pleasant, something more entertaining than just the breath or just the next step.

The force of aversion—what in our practice today did we resist? What experiences came that we didn't really want to have happening? What did we find in our moments of meditation that we couldn't really open to or accept? That's a movement of aversion at work, of wanting to push away what's unpleasant.

Or what have we not really seen clearly today? The third of these forces is less familiar to us—the force of ignorance or delusion. It's not seen clearly. Often we overlook what we find neutral. When there's an experience in our life, whether it's a person or a taste or an experience in the body, that isn't highly charged one way or another—it's not particularly pleasant, it's not particularly painful—we tend to gloss over it because it doesn't have enough charge for us.

Sometimes our relationship to the breath is founded on this factor of ignorance. How many times have you moved away from the breath because it wasn't very exciting? Actually, the breath is a beautiful meditation object. It's chosen as our beginning focus for awareness partly because of this neutral aspect. It doesn't stir us particularly one way or another. So we can see that tendency of mind that isn't fascinated by the neutral, that wants to slide away into something more gripping, something that delights or even something that disturbs. We find both much more entertaining.

So beginning to see in our practice the movement of these three forces: the wanting to hang on to what's pleasant or change to something that's pleasant, the pushing away of what's unpleasant, and this quality of ignoring what is neutral. These three inclinations of mind can keep us restlessly busy not only through our meditation practice but in our daily outside lives as well. We see those movements much more clearly when we slow down and can simply pay attention to the mind. But it doesn't mean that it's only in our meditation that these activities are going on, that these tendencies are expressing themselves. We see them clearly here because they're highlighted against a more spacious background.

In our daily life, these tendencies tend to drive our activities and drive our relationships. They can keep us in constant movement inwardly. There can be a constant sense of restlessness, of being pushed and pulled by these various forces in the mind. And when our life is like that, when our meditation is like that, we can't find any peace.

We can't find any rest. We can't find a resting point. Because the next wave of one of these forces comes along and destroys that potential peace or calm.

These three tendencies of mind not only keep us often in a state of turmoil or agitation, but the Buddha said that they're actually the root causes of our suffering. This is a direct quote from the Buddha: that one should make an end to suffering without making an end of greed, aversion, and ignorance—this is impossible. These three states, you could say, are virtually synonymous with our situation of suffering when we are in a state of suffering. You could also say that these three in different combinations are the roots, the combining qualities of all the unhappy states that we experience.

As human beings, we've all known the range of joyful states of mind—delight and friendliness and

excitement and joy and so forth. We've also, as human beings, known the full range of the difficult or unhappy emotions: the states of fear or anger or depression or grief or sorrow. The Buddha said that these three tendencies of greed, aversion and delusion, when compounded, make up all the unhappy states of mind, all the suffering states of mind in different combinations.

There are five of these states in particular that it's helpful to tune into in our meditation practice. These are the states called the five hindrances. Those of you who have been to a few meditation retreats probably know these very well. They become real old friends in our practice. But for those of you who are new, I just want to mention them briefly because they're important forces in the mind to tune into.

The five are sense desire, which we've touched on briefly and Christopher talked about last night; aversion, which is this element of disliking or resisting; sleepiness or drowsiness, which those of you who've been at the sittings after lunch are well familiar with; the state of restlessness, of inner agitation; and the state of doubt. The state of doubt is usually announced by the arrival of the phrase, "What on earth am I doing here?" which we usually experience a few times in the first few days of a retreat.

Start to become familiar in your practice with the movement of desire, when there's a feeling of wanting some other experience or wanting to be somewhere else. Look at how that affects the mind. When there's a movement to disliking, to pushing away our current experience, see how the mind feels when that state is present. Feel the contraction that that kind of resistance brings. Notice the cloud of dullness or drowsiness, the agitation of restlessness.

Doubt in some ways is the most insidious of all the hindrances because when doubt is there and we're unaware of it, it really cripples our motivation. We stop our practice. We stop looking when doubt is strong. We don't have the courage or the faith or the interest to keep looking, to continue to be mindful. So it can actually pull the plug on all of our practice.

If we can be mindful of these forces in the mind, of the five hindrances, then there is a possibility of not being caught by them. The hindrances are such that they have a way of seducing us into their worldview and seducing us out of a mindful and balanced attention. If we can stay centered in the present and just see the arising of desire as desire, the arising of aversion, dullness, restlessness, or doubt, then we can actually sustain our meditation practice in the face of these difficult forces.

But if we get unconscious, if we become unmindful, the chances are that we're simply swept away with the force and we lose that ability to be present to the moment. As the mindfulness develops and we're able to maintain mindfulness in the face of these hindrances, they don't have to be problems. They can simply be another focus for our awareness, another thing to be conscious of as we practice. But they're difficult energies because by their very nature they tend to seduce us out of that mindfulness. So it's very important to pay attention. These are typically the forces that undermine our ability to be aware, to pay attention.

The process of purification of the practice is one that primarily involves bringing the light of awareness into these distracting forces, whether we consider them the root causes of greed, aversion, and ignorance, or these compounded forces of the five hindrances. Purification is not necessarily a process that takes place over a long period of time. Any mind moment when you can bring a clear attention to any of these difficult forces of mind—that is a moment of purification. That is a moment when you've actually transformed a moment of confusion or greed or even hatred into a moment of clear seeing. The purification is happening in that moment.

It's not that these states have to go away immediately. It's not that you have to get rid of these states for that purification to begin. Rather, the presence of that clear attention is itself the purifying factor that transforms that moment from being caught in the unwholesome to greeting the unwholesome from a very clear and understanding place of mind. So the transformation is not so much that we get rid of these states, but we transform our relationship to them. When we can be aware of them clearly, they don't have the same power to move us, to bother us, to motivate us as they did before.

The purification takes place in any moment when you can bring that clear attention and understanding to each of these difficult states of mind. Mindfulness then starts to take the power out of the unhappy states, out of the states that lead to suffering. As the forces of greed and aversion and delusion lose their power in the mind, correspondingly, just like the opposite side of a balance, the forces that are their opposites become more strong, become increased.

The opposite of greed the Buddha usually described actually as non-greed. The opposite of aversion, being very precise, he described as non-aversion. And the opposite of delusion, he described as non-delusion. The Buddha often talked in these terms. I think he was very skillful with words and didn't want to set up goals for us to generate more desire around.

But speaking in more familiar terms, we know that the opposite of greed, or trying to gain more, is generosity—feeling that we have enough to give. The opposite of aversion or disliking is the mind of friendliness, or metta, which means loving-kindness in English. The opposite of delusion is the state of wisdom, or the state of seeing clearly things as they are.

So as the purification takes place and the qualities of greed, aversion, and delusion are decreased, correspondingly there's more generosity in our experience. There's more love and there's more wisdom. This is all in the direct work of awareness in relating even to the difficult states of mind. It's a direct outcome.

But in reducing the power of the difficult emotions, there's not just a quantitative shift going on. It's not just that our emotions kind of get healthier and stronger and better. That's sort of the bodybuilding model of meditation, where we want those washboard abs and well-defined pecs. That would be that approach to meditation—polishing our emotions more and more highly for the rest of our meditation career, the sort of fixing ourselves project that can go on and on.

But I think there's also a qualitative shift that happens. More than just a shift in quantity, there's a qualitative shift in our experience that starts to happen with the practice of awareness. I describe it primarily as a shift in identity—that we stop taking ourselves to be one thing and learn a new way of seeing who or what we actually are.

As we're involved and consumed by these forces like greed, aversion, and confusion, they're generally in relation to one person. And guess who that person tends to be? They all tend to revolve around the I—all the self-centered concerns that we express through our thoughts, speech, and actions, trying to gain more pleasure, trying to keep the pain away.

As we let go of these individual self-concerns, the work of the isolated ego, then naturally, on its own, awareness opens to something greater. We realize that there is a greater force at work in the universe than just our own self-interest. And I would say it's at this point that the issue of faith becomes important or becomes relevant. This is where faith can become significant in our practice.

Faith is one translation of the Pali word saddhā. The root meaning of that word in Pali, as it's been explained to me, means to place one's heart upon.

So in our tradition, faith doesn't necessarily have anything to do with a system of beliefs. In some religious traditions, faith is really "Do you believe A, B, C, and D, and sign your name at the bottom, and then you're a member of our community." That's really not the way it's viewed in dharmic terms.

A synonym for faith might be trust. Another synonym that people like is confidence. So this Pali word saddhā has all three of these connotations: faith, trust, confidence. The key thing is that it's an experiential pointer—a pointer to something from our own experience of an inward conviction that doesn't have to do with a set of beliefs or views or opinions about anything.

And it's also not particularly about blind faith, where some teacher or some supposedly learned person says something and we say, "Oh yeah, that must be so because so-and-so said it." It's not particularly about that blind faith either. It really grows out of our own experience, our experience of meditation, our wise understanding of life. So the faith that we talk about in the Dharma is really a faith that comes out of our own experience.

So the question is, what do we place our hearts upon? What do we trust in? What do we have confidence in? Because constantly through our lives, we're expressing that trust and confidence in various elements. But when we actually stop to reflect about it, it's a little mysterious what we actually trust in.

There was a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon that I liked that sort of expressed this dilemma. This came out around Christmas time, and Calvin was talking to Hobbes, saying, "This whole Santa Claus thing just doesn't make sense. Why all the secrecy? Why all the mystery? If the guy exists, why doesn't he ever show himself and prove it? And if he doesn't exist, what's the meaning of all this?"

And Hobbes says, "I don't know, isn't this a religious holiday?"

And Calvin replies, "Yeah, but actually I've got the same questions about God."

So this is sort of the situation we find ourselves in.

If there is such a thing, why doesn't it show itself and prove it? So what do we have faith in? Do we have faith in our own thoughts, our own beliefs, our own emotions, our friends, our family, our teachers? All these things are pretty changeable, pretty subject to impermanence.

Traditionally, there is an answer within the Buddhist lineage. If you went to a classically trained practitioner in Asia and asked them what the proper source of faith was, I would almost guarantee that you would get the answer: the triple gem, or the three refuges—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. These are the areas in which a devout Buddhist should have faith.

If you have a connection to the tradition and these ring true for you, that's terrific. The Buddha was an amazing individual. His teachings, the Dharma, were very inspired and still inspiring. And the community of practitioners is a refuge for all of us. So if these words ring true for you, that's beautiful. They can be very valid and genuine sources of faith.

But if you don't, then I think it's important to look within your own experience and find out experientially what that source of faith is for you. One of the things I'll suggest, and it's something I hope that you really learn in this retreat, is that mindfulness or awareness is a tremendous source of faith. Mindfulness or awareness can always be trusted. There's not a situation where that quality of awareness is not a helpful resource, not a helpful tool. Over the time together, as you go through all the ups and downs that the retreat life brings, if you continue to trust in the power of awareness, you'll see how it carries you through all the difficulties that the retreat brings and all the joys that the retreat brings to a place of deeper understanding, deeper wisdom, and deeper trust. So awareness really is our ally on this whole journey and can always be trusted.

Awareness is also an avenue to insight. And insights are also great sources of faith. I had a friend who had done a lot of meditation practice and had had some very deep insights that she felt transformed her relationship to life. She described her meditation practice this way: "I did meditation of an analytical style for years and years." What she meant by this was a kind of meditation practice where we look at the changing nature of our experience very closely. We look at the arising of the breath, the arising of thoughts, the arising of sounds, the arising of sensations, and also, for each of those, the dissolution in their turn of those same phenomena. Everything in our experience that has the nature to arise also has the nature to pass away.

From looking at all these different phenomena, all characterized by impermanence, she realized that she couldn't say that she was any of those things, because they were all coming and going. She'd looked into her experience so carefully and so closely, she couldn't take herself to be any of those things because she

could see them all coming and going. So she said, "From those years of analytic meditation, I clearly understood what I was not"—was not any of these phenomena that she could point to.

Then she said, "I had a really deep insight from an opening that came. And from that opening, I found out what I was." It's that finding out of what we are more truly or more deeply that becomes the real ground of faith, that becomes the source of a lasting faith.

When you look at great spiritual teachers, one of the things that I notice about them is that they seem to have discovered something completely trustworthy in life, and that they have in some way or to some degree surrendered to that. They've surrendered this incessant movement of self-concern that's fueled by wanting and not wanting, by hope and fear. They've surrendered that and let go into something that's vaster and far more trustworthy.

Suzuki Roshi, a great Zen master, put it this way: "We need to have faith in something that has no form or color, but that is always ready to take on form and color." This is kind of enigmatic—something that has no form or color. What is this, I wonder? Because everything that we can point to in our experience, all these phenomena that I was just referring to, all in their own way have a form or a color. Certainly sights we associate with that. Sounds sort of have a shape. Emotions have a coloration. Thoughts even seem to take a form in our mind. Anything that we can point to or describe, we could say has some sort of form and color. So it's nothing that we can directly experience with our senses, with our six senses. And yet it's something that's always ready to take on form and color. Isn't that mysterious?

I pondered on this statement for years in my own practice, and at first I thought that he was talking about something in the material world. I thought he was talking about some kind of raw matter—bare neutrons and electrons and protons, or some raw stuff that came about from the Big Bang and then took on form and color. I thought of it like that for years, and now I don't see it that way. Now I don't think of it as something material or external.

I don't see it as being out there so much. I more think what he's referring to, if we have to pick sides on this dilemma, is more on this side of things—the side of what's looking. And I now take this to mean something in the nature of the mind itself.

Because consciousness has this ability to take on any form and color that greets it in quite an impartial way. Consciousness takes on the painful as well as the pleasant. It takes on the beautiful as well as the ugly. There's no discrimination.

There's a quotation from Nisargadatta Maharaj, who was a teacher in the tradition of Vedanta in India. Someone asked him how his spiritual path unfolded. He described it this way: "I saw that in the ocean of pure awareness, the numberless waves of the phenomenal worlds arise and subside beginninglessly and endlessly. There's a mysterious power that looks after them. That power is awareness, life, God, whatever name you care to give it. It is the foundation and ultimate support of all that is, as gold is the basis for all

jewelry."

In the ocean of pure awareness, the numberless waves of the phenomenal worlds arise and subside. Another pointer to that inward dimension. When we start to get a sense of that inner dimension and can start to release into it, then we let go of the clinging to all those phenomenal waves. We don't have to hold on to any of the appearances of the mind or of the body.

And this requires an act of faith. This is an act of trust. And this act of non-clinging is what the Buddha pointed to again and again and again as the direct avenue to liberation. Direct path to liberation.

So how can we get a handle in our practice of that avenue? There's a story from the Buddha's time about a man who had journeyed over half of India to come and see him and hear about his teachings. He'd heard about the Buddha as a great teacher, made this long journey, and finally caught up with him one morning when he was on alms round. Being a mendicant, he went about early in the morning to a nearby village to beg for his food, for his meal for the day.

And this man, whose name was Bahiya, caught up with the Buddha on alms round, immediately approached him and said, "Venerable sir, I've come a long way. I'd really like to understand your teaching. Can you briefly tell me what it is?"

And the Buddha said, "Not right now, sir. I'm gathering my morning meal. Can you see me later?"

He said, "I've come a very long way. I'm very impatient to hear your teachings. Can you please just give me a brief summary?"

And the Buddha said, "I'm sorry. This is not a convenient time. Please see me later."

So Bahiya was not to be put off. He asked the Buddha a third time, "Please, can you tell me your teachings, briefly?" And as always happens in these stories, if you ask the Buddha the third time, he always says yes. So it's said that he did this time. But he gave a very condensed version. And in this discourse, we almost are hearing the pith instructions of the Buddha for meditators.

And so what the Buddha said was, "All right, Bahiya, this is how you should train. In the seeing, let there be just the seen. In the hearing, let there be just the heard. In the sensing, let there be just the sensed. In the knowing, let there be just the known. This is how you should train herein."

This is very interesting. In the seeing, let there be just the seen. What's missing? The seer is missing, isn't it? The experiencer, the hearer, the sensor, the cognizer. It's a very interesting pointing.

In our meditation practice, when we are fully with the experience of the breath, when the interest, the attention, the energy, the presence is so complete that we are entirely with that sense of the breath going in and the breath going out, is there an I even in that situation? When the full awareness is taken up with this swinging door in the abdomen or this fluttering wave of sensation in the nose or the rising in the

chest, is there any separate observer present to comment?

Begin to note the times in your practice when the awareness is so full, so complete, that the sense of I doesn't really seem to be present. Use this as an avenue to understanding the Buddha's instructions to Bahiya. Explore that sense of the separate observer that we call the experiencer or the I. See if that really has to be there all the time, or if that's something else that arises and also passes.

A medieval Christian contemplative, Angelus Silesius, put it this way: "God is a pure no-thing, concealed in now and here. The less you reach for that, the more it will appear."

When we relax, when we are not striving, when we are not driven by these compelling forces of liking and disliking, of hope and fear, when there's a sense of relaxation and greater harmony, then the sense of a separate I is not so strong. Become familiar with what that feels like in practice, when the I is not so strong. And when the I is not so strong and incessant with its demands, what is the quality of that moment? What is the quality of our experience at those times? Let that be a pointer—not stopping there, but letting that be a pointer.

Krishnamurti described this way of seeing the world as the awakening of intelligence. He spoke of a wisdom, an understanding already within us that only needs to be woken up. This intrinsic wisdom—not something we have to fabricate or create—only needs to be awakened, and it starts to explain the seeming mysteries of this world to us.

This sense of inner intelligence is not just something vague, not merely a buzzword, but something we can discover in our practice. In the beginning we may just get a sense or intuition that this rings true—that there is an intrinsic wisdom we can touch, that we can awaken. We get that intuition and that becomes the source of our faith for some time, just a sense of trust in our own feeling about that. As time goes by and we trust in that sense more and more, it may reveal itself more and more clearly until we know directly for ourselves through our own realization what that means.

As one surrenders into this innate intelligence, then one can take the hands off the steering wheel that we often grip so tightly to control our way through life. We can trust that this innate intelligence will take us through life situations easily, spontaneously, effortlessly.

Again, from Nisargadatta Maharaj: "You may not be quite conscious of your physiological functions, but when it comes to thoughts and feelings, desires and fears, you become acutely self-conscious. To me, these too are largely unconscious. I find myself talking to people or doing things quite correctly and appropriately without being very much conscious of them. It looks as if I live my physical waking life automatically, reacting spontaneously and accurately."

This is a statement from someone who has really taken the hands off the steering wheel, who has surrendered this small sense of grasping and control to this innate intelligence, this vast intelligence.

When the mind is released in that way, released from the clinging to all phenomena, then it becomes unbound in a particular way—unbound from any clinging. The analogy that the Buddha often used in the suttas to describe this unbound state of mind was like a fire that has gone out. When you see a flame hovering around a log, you can see how the flame is clinging to the fuel of the log. When the fire goes out, it is no longer clinging to its fuel. The Buddha said that's exactly what the mind of a liberated being is like—it has gone out and is no longer clinging to this world of phenomena.

The Buddha said: "When those who know seek a bhikkhu who is liberated, they do not find anything of which they can say his or her consciousness is supported by this. Why is that? Because one thus gone is untraceable here and now." One who is liberated is untraceable here and now, because the consciousness is no longer clinging to any phenomena.

The Buddha often described this sense of liberation in negative terms. One is untraceable. The mind is unbound. It is unfindable. It is not supported. He was reluctant to describe the state in positive terms, I think because he didn't want to set up a goal.

But other teachers and traditions have not been so reluctant to describe this liberated or awakened state. In the Hindu tradition, they speak of three words: Sat, Chit, Ananda. Sat means being—the appearance of the world of form. Chit means consciousness. And Ananda means bliss or delight.

And they talk about these three as an inseparable unity. When we look at our experience, they say this is a description of our nature—that we are always in contact with the realm of being, with the realm of form. We are conscious throughout the process, and there's an underlying sense of delight in that experience.

Now, touching this sense of delight may be a little remote after a couple of days of a meditation retreat. It may seem like the hindrances are really the uppermost of experiences. But I like to tune into that sense of delight or the joy of existence sometimes by just reflecting on the play of light. Often I'll just stop in the middle of the day, and there's something about the way that light plays on objects that to me always reveals that radiance, an inner radiance of existence that bespeaks that joy.

Thomas Merton put it this way: "There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fount of action and joy. It rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created being." Again, it's that combination of awareness, of being, and of delight.

We spend a lot of time in retreats like this talking about some of the difficult aspects of existence. We talk about the fact that it's impermanent, that there's no lasting refuge, that there's an element of unsatisfactoriness if we're looking for our happiness in the world of the senses. So the challenge is: in the full awareness of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness, can we trust? Can we find that faith to open and to trust, to not cling?

There's a haiku from the Japanese that expresses this combination of factors. It says: "Simply trust. Do not the plum blossoms flutter down just like that?" It's a beautiful image of release, the plum blossom

fluttering down.

I think that all of us know on some deep level that the universe is really trustworthy, that the universe does have a core of goodness, of basic goodness, that can be trusted. But we forget. Children know this very well. There was this beautiful story—I don't remember the author or the source—but there was a mother who was sitting on the rim of a reflecting pool in some shopping center or office building. Her three-year-old daughter was walking around the rim of the pool, which was raised about two feet off the ground. The mother was sitting on the other side and she was thinking, "I know she's going to fall in. I just know she's going to fall in. Should I go grab her now or should I let her grow up and fall in?" And she decided to just let her daughter be on the edge of the pool.

So the daughter was walking around, and sure enough, a few seconds later, the daughter fell in the pool. She screamed, and the mother went over and pulled her out of the pool. And when the daughter came out of the pool, she said, "I thought I'd be afraid, Mommy, but when I slipped, my little voice said, 'Have fun falling.'"

Have fun falling. So on some deep level, I think we know to trust, but we forget. We forget to trust. We forget to have faith. And sometimes we don't quite know how to step out of the way. That I is so insistent with its conditioned responses.

Someone asked Nisargadatta Maharaj about his degree of freedom. They said, "Does your spontaneity come as a result of realization or by training?" And Maharaj said—you know, it's an interesting question. Is it just one flash of insight that liberates, or does this path of gradual training that we're all embarked on play a role? It's an interesting question. Maharaj said both. "Devotion to your goal makes you live a clean and orderly life, given to the search for truth and to helping people. Realization makes virtue easy by removing for good the obstacles in the shape of desires and fears and wrong ideas. Both are necessary."

So in our practice, can we start to tune into this phenomenon of the self, the small self when it expresses itself—these sometimes incessant demands of wanting and not wanting, of hope and fear? Can we come to know that simply as the movement of the I, the movement of desire in its different forms?

And then can we also come to know those times when the urgency of the self is not so strong, not so compelling? Look at your experience in those times. What are those moments like? Is there a sense of peace when that small I isn't active? Is there a sense of calm? Is there a sense of greater harmony? Is there a sense in those times of an active intelligence? Is there a sense of being able to trust at those moments?

It's not to say that faith is only applicable in those moments when the mind is quiet. If that were the case, this would be a very limited possibility, because our minds are always going to be back and forth between movement and stillness, movement and stillness.

But rather, it's in those times of stillness that we can start to receive those inklings—those glimpses into a deeper nature that is ever-present, that exists in the times of movement as well as the times of stillness.

Our trust in that nature can sustain us through all the changes the mind goes through.

Faith can actually be a path in itself. This is not much talked about in the Buddhist tradition. Faith as a path is more commonly associated with the Hindu bhaktis or the Christian path. Yet this is something that the Buddha said to a bhikkhu in his time, one of his students. The Buddha said, "Pingya"—that was the name of the bhikkhu—"other people have freed themselves by the power of faith. Vakali, Bhadra Buddha, and Alavi have all done this. You too should let that strength release you. You too will go to the further shore beyond the draw of death."

Another time that the Buddha spoke about faith, he discussed it in terms of what he called the five spiritual faculties—five qualities of mind that when developed and maintained lead directly to liberation. The five spiritual faculties are faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. He said that when these five spiritual faculties are developed and maintained, they reach to the deathless, they end in the deathless, they merge in the deathless. Deathless is another word for the absolute or the unconditioned or nirvana in the Buddha's vocabulary.

So faith can be a tremendous path in itself. This is from a poet named Lalla, a mystical poet who lived in northern India in the fourteenth century. She wrote long lines like Kabir, and she said: "Meditate within eternity. Don't stay in the mind. Your thoughts are like a child fretting near its mother's breast, restless and afraid, who with a little guidance can find the path of courage."

This is another expression of the path of faith.

I'd like to close with a quotation from actually one of my favorite texts in the whole Buddhist tradition. It's a little text called the Xin Xin Ming, a Chinese text that translates as Verses on the Faith Mind. This is from the conclusion of that text:

"For the unified mind in accord with the way, all self-centered striving ceases. Doubts and irresolution vanish, and life in true faith is possible. To live in this faith is the road to non-duality, because the non-dual is one with the trusting mind."

Let's just sit for a minute or two together.

For the unified mind in accord with the way, all self-centered striving ceases. Doubts and irresolution vanish, and life in true faith is possible.

---

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