# Faith as a Spiritual Faculty

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 50:40

You all tuned into the news this morning, but I did, and I sort of wished that I hadn't. When I tune into the news these days, there was a fragile peace starting to establish itself in the Middle East, and then yesterday and today there were two suicide bombings of Israelis. Sharon returned from Washington from peace talks vowing retribution, and I also heard there was a suicide bombing in Pakistan today. Of course it brings up for me the events of last September and what the repercussions of all of that are going to be.

I read something in the news the other day that really shocked me and was kind of a wake-up call. Warren Buffett is the second richest man in the United States. He's mostly an investor, but his core holdings are insurance companies. So he got very interested in the ramifications of September 11th and how to look at insurance in a new light because his companies had something like $3.5 billion in charges relating to the events of September. He's also a pretty smart guy.

His comment was, after looking at this whole situation, he came out and said that a nuclear attack on the United States is a certainty. He said this is not just something that might happen—it's virtually certain that this will happen. Because with the proliferation of the technology of how to make nuclear bombs, and the increasing anger directed at the United States and the rest of the world, he said this is not a question of if, it's only a question of when. It could be within the next 10 years, it could be within the next 50 years. He said most likely it would be New York or Washington.

I don't know about you, but I'd sort of settled back in since September 11th to feeling more comfortable and like maybe we were over the worst of it. And then someone as smart and obviously wary of the risks as Warren Buffett says something like that, and we have to think again. So it's kind of a wake-up call that the world is an unpredictable place. It's a place that's fraught with insecurity for our bodies and minds and hearts. The possibility of loss is huge for all of us, and the events of last September woke that up as well.

Then I started to think: you can take this kind of understanding about the precarious situation that we're all in in one of two directions. You can get really depressed about it. There's a lot of sadness that accompanies this, and you can just spiral down in that weight of depression and despair. Or there's also the possibility to take that information and use it to actually awaken our spiritual life—to crystallize a sense of urgency and caring and compassion and to use it to deepen our spiritual qualities.

So I wanted to toss out for your reflection the question: what is it that sends some of us in one direction, just kind of being bowed down in despair at the situation, and that allows other people actually to grow from that kind of insight, that kind of awakening? What makes the difference? When you look around

yourself and your friends, you probably can see people who are going in two different directions with all this news and these changes. What's the capacity or what is it that lets people respond differently, either to grow and open or to basically close down further?

One response was that it can resolve grief and trauma—that people rely somewhat on practice, so carryover from the past that hasn't been examined or opened to gets re-stimulated.

Another perspective: "I think the people that I see who are able to have it—at the end of the day it's the balance—but the people that I see that are holding it in a way that I really admire, they live their life that way. It's like they walk that path. And so when it comes, if they have the balance to be with the pain and to also hold it in some way, it's really a magnificent thing to see. But I think this practice is the path, for me. I'm taking baby steps on that path. But when you see people that have practiced for a long time, I think they do have it."

So it really has to do with the amount of preparation that people have put in their lives to finding that kind of balance through their practice.

Another insight: the person who goes forward is often the person who is willing to take that risk to go forward, doesn't know what's going to happen, but is willing to leave the comfort zone. The relationship to change, the willingness to let go, the ability to be flexible and adapt.

And finally, coming from a belief that we are a part of something much bigger.

Thank you. Connection to nature, to pets, to the bigger picture of life once again. Faith in people, faith in humankind. And then there was this beautiful insight about the skill of listening—listening interpersonally, listening globally, and listening to the pain within our own bodies, the stored trauma and unresolved grief. Meditation really can be described as the art of listening, both inwardly and outwardly.

I appreciate all those comments. There's profound wisdom in every single one of them, and they really help bring focus to what I wanted to explore with you. My own reflection brought me to a similar place. I felt that it comes down to whether one is able to meet the events of the moment with a balanced mind that also holds compassion and understanding. This kind of ability often emerges from having practiced it. It's difficult to suddenly find this capacity on September 11th if we haven't discovered how to cultivate it beforehand.

Sometimes in meditation it seems like we offer many different instructions. This morning I probably gave five instructions, and that was brief. I could easily give a hundred different meditation instructions. There's working with sounds, with space, with the body, with thoughts and emotions. We can become particular about body sensations, focus solely on the breath, get precise about the in-breath and out-breath, practice sweeping attention through the body, or meditate on no object at all. The list goes on and on. This technology has been refined for 2500 years, so there are countless techniques.

But I believe it all comes down to one basic instruction: Get as good an approximation as you can of what the awakened state of mind is, and put yourself there.

What the Buddha was trying to convey through all his words and teachings was to share with us what he had discovered. The discovery is, in one way, fairly simple. It's a way of looking at the world, a way of experiencing the world that is awake and peaceful. These are two fundamental qualities of the awakened state—awake and peaceful.

When we can rest in that place, different aspects shine out spontaneously. The doors open for all the beautiful qualities of heart and mind to express themselves naturally. We don't have to call them forth; they're already there when we're established in that awakened place.

So our job as meditators is to discover for ourselves what that awakened place feels like, as best we can. This is a gradual path, so we're not Buddhas yet. We don't see the world as clearly as the Buddha did. But to the extent that we can intuit where he was pointing, can we place ourselves there, moment after moment?

In our meditation first of all—that's our training ground. Suzuki Roshi said that meditation is like learning to bake bread. You just keep putting it in the oven. You mix the dough and put it in the oven again and again until you discover what makes a perfect loaf of bread. This is what we're doing in meditation—trying moment after moment to find that awakened place within us.

There are many different ways to describe this state. At the end of our February retreat here, someone asked the teachers to sum up the essence of what we're looking for, what we're aspiring toward. We each had our own expression. Sylvia's was something like "the mind is clear and the heart is open." My summary was "an empty awareness pervaded by loving-kindness."

Different people had other variations on the theme, but you can get the flavor. There's this one kind of taste of awakeness, and within it, many beautiful qualities can emerge. That's why I wanted to check in—when you touch this place of being awake and settled, what do you find?

To refresh, some of the qualities you mentioned were peaceful, pleasant, relaxed, spacious, with boundaries between self and other dissolving, heightened senses, contentment, and a sense of wholeness through the body. These actually map quite beautifully onto a framework that the Buddha described.

The Buddha had different ways of describing this awakened state. One concept cannot capture it—it's a felt sense, a non-verbal experience. So it gets described from different angles. In the Tibetan tradition, they speak of it being like a diamond. Twirl the diamond one way and you see certain facets; twirl it another way and other facets appear. We need to become familiar with all the facets of this diamond that is our awakened nature.

One of my favorite groupings of these qualities is what the Buddha called the five spiritual faculties: faith,

energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. These are essentially five aspects of this diamond. Let me connect them to your observations this morning.

The faith aspect was echoed in comments about belief in something greater, connection beyond ourselves, faith in humankind. Energy appeared in Joe's mention of dedication to doing this work over years and years, building up this strength of mind. Many of you spoke to the mindfulness aspect—heightened senses, awareness touching every aspect of experience. Concentration showed up in the stillness you mentioned, the peace and relaxation, and especially that sense of wholeness through the body. This wholeness is actually a sign of what we call unification of mind—everything coming together. And wisdom emerged when Lynn spoke of seeing change and impermanence, understanding the non-separation between ourselves and the world—what came through in comments about merging, connection to something greater.

I want to explore each of these five qualities in more detail, but please keep in mind that you've already been touching on them all. This isn't foreign territory—we're simply drawing out different aspects of a state you're already familiar with.

Faith is really crucial. The Buddha placed it first. He understood these five qualities both sequentially and circularly—faith leading to energy, energy to mindfulness, mindfulness to concentration, concentration to wisdom. Yet they also work circularly: as we develop wisdom, faith deepens, which strengthens our commitment and energy, and so forth.

Faith serves as a real beginning point in Buddhism. You all had to have some faith to sit down and try meditation for the first time. Someone told you this was worthwhile, or you read something that convinced you to give it a try.

Just last week on retreat in Colorado, during an interview, someone came to me saying, "I have a really important question and I'm not going to be able to keep from crying when I ask you." Then she said, "I look around and the world is such a mess. What can one have faith in?" And she did start crying. "What can I have faith in?"

This connects back to listening to the daily news. Without some kind of greater faith, it becomes truly depressing. What can we place our faith in?

I want to make one comment about keeping faith in touch with the world. Sometimes we all become overburdened by what's happening globally. You can focus on the destruction of the earth, the death and poverty and starvation, the ongoing wars, torture as state policy in many places, the oppression of women, the neglect of children—the list is endless.

And sometimes in looking at all that, we can get really a sense of it being too much to hold. One of my teachers who's an activist said something I thought was kind of wise. He said, when there's that sense that it's too much to handle, narrow your focus of seeing. Don't send your imagination and your thoughts out

that far. Because it's really important that we maintain our own inner balance.

I'd say especially in doing work of an activist nature, if you're really looking to change the world and you care a lot about it, one of the greatest things I think we can bring to the world is our own sanity, our own balance. I often wonder, does the world need more anger? Does it need more frustration? Does it need more blame? Does it need more name-calling? I'm not sure. But I know that it needs our love, our kindness, our own inner balance. And if, in an activist role, that can start to come through, that's a beautiful way to change the dialogue. The Dalai Lama is a great example of that, working with the Chinese government.

This is from a young Tibetan Lama. He's living in Ladakh, a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism. He was talking about his own situation. Born outside of Tibet and having grown up since the devastation happened, he said, "I was given a Western education for which I am grateful in many ways, but I lost something. I lost the peace of mind that I might have had in another generation. Everyone in our generation lives in a fragmented, complex, disturbing time in which it is hard to keep one's spiritual balance, hard to find the time to build that balance in the first place. I feel increasingly that I must go into retreat more, must meditate more, must discipline myself more. Otherwise, I shall be of no use to my people."

This is in Ladakh. It's too busy in Ladakh. It's too crazy in Ladakh. So what does that say about North America in the 21st century? How much time do we need? How much balance do we have to work to find?

This quality of faith in Buddhism is a translation of the Pali term *saddhā*. Pali is the ancient Indian language that the teachings came down in. *Saddhā* literally means, the etymology is to place one's heart upon. I think this is a nice reflection because in Buddhism faith isn't about belief. It's not about "I hold this set of principles to be true, this is the only truth and everybody else is crazy so I'm ready to fight with you." It's not particularly an intellectual thing. It's more a heart sense of trust, or you could say confidence.

So another interesting reflection is where do we put our trust or confidence? Because we all put it somewhere. It's interesting, if you look around the world, everybody has their own philosophy of life. Everybody's a philosopher. Everybody puts their trust in something, believes in something. Where is ours? And is it in a place that can hold it effectively?

If we didn't have faith, if we didn't have that kind of trust, we'd be in a panic right now. So there's something that we all have placed our hearts upon. One of the things the Buddha said is it's wise to place your heart on something that's beyond change. Because the things that are subject to change, when they do change, your faith can crumble.

So before he started his practice, he was 29 years old, and he said, "I saw that I was subject to aging, and I saw the pain in what is subject to aging." He said, "Seeing that, I gave up the vanity of youth. I saw that I was subject to illness. I saw the pain in what is subject to illness, and seeing that, I gave up the vanity of

health. I saw that I was subject to death. I saw the pain in what is subject to death. And seeing that, I gave up the vanity of life."

This is pretty amazing insight from somebody who's 29 years old. I think most of us, when we're young, tend to put our faith in our youth, in our health, and in life. But sooner or later, all those things will be taken away from us. And then what do we have to put our faith in when that happens?

Fred Wahpepah is a beautiful Native American teacher who teaches at Spirit Rock from time to time, and we built a sweat lodge just over the creek for Fred to use when he comes. He usually leads sweats as part of his teaching here. So one time, it was the first time I did a sweat with him. The stones were brought in and he had just sealed the flap and was starting to talk about the philosophy of the sweat, how to hold it.

One of the first things he said to us was, "You know, in our Indian language, we don't have any word for hope. There's no word for hope. That's because we know that everything's all right."

I thought that was an amazing expression for somebody whose whole culture had been mostly destroyed over the last 150 years. "We know everything's all right." That's that quality of real faith, the heartfelt faith. Despite all the change, despite the suffering that goes on in the world, somehow the sense that everything's all right. That's beautiful.

In every spiritual tradition, there is some pointing to this perfection of things, even in the midst of imperfection. The way Suzuki Roshi put it—he's a great Zen teacher—he said, "The world is perfect and there's a lot of room for improvement." But can we see both those sides? Can we see the perfection and the beauty of the world and at the same time not blind ourselves to seeing the shortcomings, what can still be improved?

I think nature is a good pointer to that, physical nature. The beauty of the physical world in its natural state is a reminder to us of the presence of beauty, the presence of goodness in the world that our hearts can connect with and touch. But physical nature alone isn't enough. It's not the end-all and the be-all. It's not the core of a spiritual path in Buddhist terms. But it can be a pointer to that kind of perfection.

In Buddhism it's more pointing us back to our own hearts, that we take nature as a reminder or a cue or a demonstration of the native goodness of the universe that's also in our own hearts.

I'm just going to share one cartoon with you, one because Sylvia turned me on to it, so it's a way of bringing her into the class, but also because it kind of illustrates this concept of trust seeping into the mainstream. The cartoon is this: There are two policemen in an urban setting, and they've got a guy spread-eagled against a car. They're reading him his Miranda rights. And so the caption is, "You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to an attorney. Anything you say can and will be used against you. Whether you understand it or not, you are a child of the universe and everything is unfolding just the way it should." If I have to be arrested, I'd love to have the cop read me that. Unfolding just the way it should.

So what can we as practitioners find that offers that kind of faith? What can we put our trust in?

"No matter what happens, love will still arise in the human heart," someone offered.

Yes, faith and love surviving in the human heart.

Rose shared, "My definition of faith for a long time was just the absence of fear. Having that absence, I can relax and be okay in a way that I couldn't before." So faith is the absence of fear and a returning to that knowing, that understanding.

Sam reflected, "I remember where this really sank in. All of a sudden I understood that the 10,000 sorrows do not negate the 10,000 joys. The 10,000 joys are always here, they're always there. And so that's been phenomenal for me. They're right here." Yes, not losing touch with the joys and beauty of existence also.

Another student said, "For me, it's sitting and being present. Being with what is right now. Not what I'm cramming into my future, but allowing me to be present." So faith in being with what is in the moment. You could say being with the truth of things.

"For me," someone shared, "after decades of practice, there's this experience of being able to have access to something within, just below. I don't have any blindness about it, yet I can still have access to it, and I can open up to it so it can come through."

The pain, confusion, and suffering I've experienced have been profound gifts. They've slowly carved out an avenue within me, because I wouldn't know how else—how I or anybody—could learn to stay present with such intensity.

Using the suffering of life to spur one toward discovering what can possibly hold it or resolve it, and then trusting in what you discover through that process.

In this part of my life, I find myself deeply drawn to working in a Zen hospice setting. What I witness there comes without my asking, without effort on my part. Just yesterday, I saw a man smoking outside—someone whose leg had been amputated, leaving one shorter than the other. I allowed myself to really look at him and take in his presence. The experience I had was of incredible wholeness radiating from him.

He caught me looking at him and smiled, beginning to engage me in conversation. I realized that this sense of completeness, this peace I witnessed, had nothing to do with me at all. It was simply manifesting through itself, creating genuine contact between us.

This brings us to the classical teachings on faith. The Buddha taught that practitioners can place their faith in the three gems: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. These are traditionally the three sources of refuge, of trust, of confidence that we can come to know for ourselves.

The Buddha died twenty-five hundred years ago. He's not here anymore. How can we have faith in

someone who is dead? There are a couple of ways to understand this.

We can understand the Buddha in terms of that awakened state of mind. There's a beautiful story about a monk who was completely smitten with the Buddha, following him around like a puppy dog wherever he went. When the Buddha would turn around, this devoted monk would be right there, trying to absorb his presence, sitting and gazing at him in complete adoration.

Finally, the Buddha turned to him and said, "No, no, go off and practice. You don't need to hang around me. Seeing me isn't going to do you much good. The one who sees the Dharma truly sees the Buddha. One who sees the Dharma sees the Buddha."

So one who really understands the deepest truth has seen the real nature of the Buddha. In this way, the Buddha can be alive for each of us today. The closer we get to this awakened state, the more we sense for ourselves what the Buddha is—what the Buddha is in our own heart, our own potential for Buddhahood, because we all have that.

In the Mahayana traditions, this is often described through three aspects of our essential nature—who we truly are beyond change. We're not really this body. All spiritual traditions tell us this. It's the mistake of identifying ourselves with this body that creates the root of our limited sense of self, this constricted and contracted self-centeredness that causes all unhappiness.

Who we really are in our essence is empty space. Our nature is basically this empty space that, secondly, has the quality of awareness. When you opened up earlier and listened to sounds, could you sense that your awareness extends on and on forever? That there are no boundaries to your awareness?

As far away as the sounds reach, your awareness can go there and receive them. As distant as the sun, your awareness can touch. As remote as the stars, our senses can maintain some connection. The sense is that awareness pervades that space—not as two separate things, but as one unified reality.

What we really are is this empty space of knowing.

These two qualities also include a third quality—that awareness is ceaselessly responsive. This means that out of that empty awareness manifest all the beautiful qualities of heart and mind: wisdom, compassion, listening, understanding, gratitude, faith, insight. All these arise naturally from that space.

When you think about yourself in terms of the Buddha or what to have trust in, this is what is sometimes called Buddha nature. It's said to be most deeply what we are. It's unchanging—this is our nature beyond change. Different facets will manifest, different qualities of this diamond will radiate at different times. But this essential nature of empty space pervaded with awareness is what we most deeply are.

As we come to trust in that, we come to that which is within us but is not of us, as you were saying. It's something that's in us, but it's not personal. It's not mine or yours because we all have it. This also lets us feel the true inner connection when we realize that we share this with everything that lives. One of the

Chinese Zen masters said, "All human beings, and in fact all wriggling things, are possessed of this great nirvanic nature." It's a nature like nirvana—unchanging in that way.

The Dharma are the teachings of the Buddha or the truth, the instructions that point us to this discovery. In the ultimate sense, Dharma is used for this nature that we discover as well. So we have faith in the teachings, and often that's our first source of faith. It was mine.

I was sixteen years old, living in Webster Groves, Missouri, in the dark ages, let me tell you. This was about 1964. I wandered into a bookstore that I frequented from time to time—I had a kind of reflective state of mind back then. I saw this book on the shelf called *The Way of Zen* by Alan Watts. There was this Buddha image on the cover, and I don't know why, but I bought it. I didn't read it right away. I kept it on my shelf, and a couple of years later I picked it up and started reading it. That was my first connection to anything really spiritual. I'd been brought up Protestant, which is about as remote from real spirituality as I know of. Sorry. That was my Midwestern experience—I don't mean to make a blanket statement about that. There are many beautiful Christians from Protestant denominations in the world as well. That was just my experience.

This really awakened me to another way of looking and the possibility of freedom. Freedom from all suffering? You mean my teenage neuroses could be liberated? That was pretty attractive to me.

So it could be a book, could be a Dharma talk, somebody sharing their understanding. The other avenue for many of us is the Sangha. We run into somebody who embodies some of these qualities, these beautiful qualities of heart or mind, and we're just struck that such a human being is possible.

The first retreat I went to was led by Joseph Goldstein, among others. I liked Joseph from the very beginning. He's so light. I'd never met anybody who carried himself and viewed his life with such a feeling of lightness. His mind just didn't seem to get hooked or caught anywhere, and he always had this happiness about him. So I spent a lot of time with Joseph over many years. That was 1976, and this is twenty-six years later. I've come to know him as a teacher, spending much time just learning from him.

I've come to know him as a colleague. We've worked together on three-month courses in other places, and as a friend. We hang out and do things together. Over the years, seeing Joseph in all these different modes, I'm even more impressed than I was at the beginning. He really does have that kind of freedom in almost every area of his life. There are still a couple of places where he can get hooked and caught up, but not many. Not many. I tell you, he's pretty amazing.

When we see somebody who inspires us like that, who manifests these qualities, and we recognize that it's a possibility, this is the beginning of what's called in the tradition "bright faith." There's a quality of wonder to it. It lights us up. We get a hit off that person, off that possibility, and our eyes brighten thinking, "That's really possible for human beings?" Someone like the Dalai Lama is great at evoking that quality of bright faith in people. You really see the human potential.

The Buddha talked extensively about how important this is—to be around people who inspire us. Ananda was his cousin and attendant for twenty-five years, the last twenty-five years of his life. Ananda was a very beautiful, giving, kind, and generous person, but the Buddha always had to correct Ananda's understanding. Half the suttas involve the Buddha correcting Ananda's understanding.

In one case, Ananda comes up and says to the Buddha, "Venerable One, I've been thinking. I believe that spiritual friendship—that is, association with wise people—is a full half of the holy life." And the Buddha said, "Say not so, Ananda," as he always did. "Association with spiritual friends is the whole of the holy life."

He went on to explain why. It's not just because it's pleasant to spend time with people who are peaceful. It is pleasant to be around peaceful people, but that's not really what it's about in its essence. The Buddha continued: "For when one associates with spiritual friends, one can be expected to develop and pursue the Noble Eightfold Path."

Good spiritual friends accept us as we are, but also challenge us to grow. They motivate us, they encourage us, they challenge us to develop those highest qualities within ourselves. Associating with such people, we can't escape that encouragement and stimulation and inspiration. So it's not just because it's wonderful to be around them, but also because they foster our own development. A good spiritual friend will actually encourage our development in that way.

We see that faith in this context has another implication for us as practitioners, for us as Buddhists: it ought to lead to effort. Faith is a beautiful quality in itself. It opens us up in that way of trusting, that absence of fear that was mentioned, but it needs to go further. It needs to say, "Look, you've seen what's possible. You've seen these qualities manifest in someone else. You can develop those in yourself. What's holding you back?"

The faith needs to spur us to make the next step, which is effort or energy. As we begin to make that effort, then we investigate the teachings, we explore the qualities of the path, and when we find that they can indeed develop, we move to the next level of faith, which is called "verified faith."

So the movement is bright faith, effort, and then verified faith. We verify it through our own experience. That's how I think of this path. To me, it's like the science of the mind. Science is about universal laws that can be repeated under proper laboratory conditions. We create the proper laboratory conditions when we sit down and look at our own minds and bodies, and from that we can repeat the same results that the Buddha found.

Attention brings calm. Calm brings concentration. When the mind is steady, we can understand. Life is change. If you cling, you suffer. We can repeat those experiments and verify them. Then it's the level of verified faith.

I want to talk a little about this quality of opening that a couple of people touched on, and look at what's

involved in that. When you come to that place of stillness and presence in your meditation practice, have you ever gotten nervous?

When we settle into that place of stillness in meditation, it's remarkable how many people experience nervousness. This is actually quite natural and understandable. In stillness, we've dropped our usual defenses—we're not carrying our life history or personal story into the moment. We're not bringing our relationships, our worries about finances, our familiar identities. We've simply dropped everything, allowing our attention to meet the bare facts of life directly.

In this state, we are utterly exposed, vulnerable, open. Our attention meets life itself—unmediated, raw, immediate. This directness can feel unsettling. It takes real courage to release the security of past and future, to drop our carefully constructed personality, and simply touch the moment without buffers.

This willingness to be present without protection—this absence of fear—is essential to the practice. As we grow more familiar with this vulnerability, we discover it's not actually dangerous. Being open and exposed begins to feel natural, even though initially it may seem far too raw.

Chögyam Trungpa, the Tibetan teacher, offers a beautiful analogy for this tender openness. He suggests imagining a very sore spot on our body—so sensitive that we avoid rubbing or scratching it. In the shower, we're careful not to soap it too vigorously because it hurts. This sore spot represents compassion. Even when we're caught in aggression, insensitivity, or laziness, we always have this soft place somewhere within us—a point we can cultivate.

He elaborates: "A more vivid analogy might be of an opened wound, which is always there. That opened wound is usually very inconvenient and problematic. We would like to be tough, we would like to come on strong, but there will always be a sore spot. At least we are accessible somewhere. So we are not completely covered with a suit of armor all the time."

What relief this brings—to realize we don't have to be perpetually armored!

This vulnerability becomes the very place where our heart opens and can be touched. When the heart is accessible, it becomes the doorway through which all the heart qualities can emerge. In our tradition, we call these the Brahma-viharas: loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. That tender, vulnerable space allows these qualities to flow forth naturally. The world can touch us, and we can touch the world through this sensitive, open heart.

Trungpa continues with even deeper insight: "There's also an inner wound or Buddha nature. This is like a heart that has been sliced and bruised with wisdom and compassion. When the inner wound and the outer wound begin to meet and to communicate, then we begin to realize that our whole being is made out of one complete sore spot altogether. This is called bodhisattva fever."

In this understanding, vulnerability itself becomes compassion. We no longer have any way to defend

ourselves—nor do we need to. Faith creates the pathway to this tender openness, and this openness becomes the gateway through which loving-kindness and compassion naturally extend into the world.

There's a beautiful passage from "Verses on the Faith Mind," a classic Zen text by the Third Zen ancestor, that speaks directly to this. You can find it in Jack Kornfield's excellent collection, "Teachings of the Buddha"—a wonderful reference if you're looking for a single book sampling the Buddha's teachings.

Near the end of this text, we find these verses:

"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 with this realization is to be without anxiety about non-perfection. To live in this faith is the road to non-duality, for the non-dual is one with the trusting mind."

When doubts and irresolution vanish, life in true faith becomes possible. Living with this realization means we can release our anxiety about being imperfect. This faith itself becomes the path to non-duality—for the non-dual mind and the trusting mind are one and the same.

So we come back to this deep sense of trust in the basic goodness of life, of ourselves, and that gives us the ability to accommodate without so much anxiety all the things that are wrong, all the things in the world that aren't right, that aren't perfect. We can open to them because of this really deep-seated trust that's more basic.

We only explored one of the spiritual faculties today, but we talk about the others most of the time—mindfulness and concentration and wisdom and energy. I wanted to speak about faith because it's one that we don't tend to verbalize very much, so I wanted to touch on it today.

Thank you for listening.

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