Faith (Saddhā)

Brian Lesage · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 53:17

Tonight I wanted to share with you some reflections on this mental factor of faith in terms of our practice.

Before I really got involved or fully immersed myself in the Theravada Vipassana practice, I lived in a Rinzai Zen community for about six years. After about a year of spending my time there—and it was actually a very demanding lifestyle—we would get up at three o'clock in the morning and wouldn't go to bed until about nine-thirty at night. This was all during the summer and the winter. In the fall and spring, we'd get a break so we wouldn't have to get up until four-thirty. For me, someone who is actually not a morning person, you can imagine how demanding it was.

But after a year, I noticed that my faith really deepened. I was really taken by the Dharma. I really fell in love with it. And so after a year, I decided to get ordained. I committed my life to the Dharma, and that's the direction I saw it going in. It was a beautiful expression of faith to undergo that.

But then about a year after I got ordained—and especially after I got ordained—I got really gung-ho about the practice. I really tried to be diligent about it. If you know anything about Rinzai Zen, there's a kind of edge to it. As one friend told me, the way the Japanese interpreted Buddhism is they had this sense that in India, they would sit for eight hours a day, and in China, they would work for eight hours a day. The Japanese thought, we want the best of both—so let's sit for eight hours a day and work for eight hours a day. I think that was a wonderful description of Rinzai Zen.

So I really applied myself to the practice. But then after about a year of being ordained, I hit this huge metaphorical wall. Actually, I remember the specific evening that this happened—a huge wall in terms of my life and my practice. I was coming back from what's called sanzen, an interview with the Zen master. I can't exactly remember what happened in the interview room, but obviously it was something that allowed me to emotionally just shatter. That evening was such an incredibly dark night.

What had happened was this huge doubt emerged. And not only did a huge doubt emerge in my mind, but I got hooked by it. I'm sure many of you know this. Have you noticed how doubt can weave the most convincing stories that feel so real? When you're really caught in the grips of doubt, it's so convincing.

Part of the stories going through my head while I was sitting there in the evening coming back from the interview room—imagining these rows of everybody in their black robes sitting very silently—the thoughts careening through my head were something like, "What the hell am I doing here?" And then I'd look around, and of course that didn't help. Here I am wearing these black robes, shaved head, all these other people with black robes and shaved heads and this bib that they call a rakusu around my neck.

Obviously this increased the doubt—doubt in terms of the situation I found myself in. And then it started to fall back on myself. Not only what the hell am I doing here, but I can't do this. I must be the worst practitioner in this meditation hall. That kind of feeling. Have you ever gone through that? The worst yogi story?

So there were these two qualities of doubt: I can't do this, and intermixed with this, this doesn't work. Again, as I said, it was a dark evening.

Within that, when there started to become more clarity about the nature of this mind state, there was wanting. There was this wanting mind, an expectation. A lot of times, the wanting mind is expecting something. What I was looking for in practice—the story that was enmeshed in there—was the story that I'm a broken person, something's wrong with me. And if I practice diligently enough, if only I practice hard enough and I'm sincere about this practice, then maybe one day I'll become a whole person. Maybe I'll even become a perfect person. I won't have any of those imperfections anymore.

And then there'll be this quality of perfection. Have you ever been seduced by that dream? That maybe you could practice and all your imperfections would go away? Or that you'd become a person who doesn't have imperfections?

I noticed that this was fueling my practice. And so it was a dark night to recognize that for a year, this had been fueling my practice. But luckily, a small gem arose out of the experience. I remember the next morning feeling so shattered, and then recommitting myself to something much more simple—simply being aware of whatever activity I was involved in, this quality of awareness that's been spoken about so often on this retreat. The way that Guy and Carol have referred to it: awareness infused with intelligence and caring, with kindness.

The Zen life was perfect for this, really bringing attention to all the details of one's life. And it was there that a new kind of faith began to arise—a faith of truly falling in love with the practice.

Faith, at least clear faith, is an important aspect of this path. It actually creates a foundation, a basis for this practice to unfold. And I'm sure many of you know that the Buddha speaks about this in a few of those lists so common in early Buddhism. For example, in that list of the five spiritual faculties, those five qualities of mind that support the mind and allow it to move towards awakening—the first of those faculties is faith.

Another place we find the Buddha speaking about faith is in a discourse in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, the Connected Discourses, called the Upanisā Sutta, usually translated as "The Discourse on Supporting Conditions." It's a fascinating discourse, found in the section on causation, alongside all those discourses about dependent origination. In this discourse, the Buddha is again laying out the conditions that support the mind to move towards awakening. And the first condition he encourages us to cultivate is this quality of faith.

It's not only at the beginning of our practice that we want to cultivate faith, but we must nurture it along the way. There's a wonderful story from the discourses that speaks to this quality of faith—that it's something we begin with, but then nurture throughout.

The Buddha was residing outside of Magadha, near a village called Ekanāḷā, and he decided to go out for alms food in the morning. He happened upon a farmer who was feeding his workers. The farmer said to him, "Recluse, I plow and I sow, and then I eat. So if you want to eat, you must plow and sow, and then you should eat." He wasn't exactly excited about giving alms food to the Buddha.

And the Buddha says to the farmer, "I actually do. I plow and I sow."

The farmer said something to the extent of, "Where is your plow? Where are your oxen?"

This is how the Buddha replies—I want to share just parts of it because I think it's a striking image. He says, "Faith is the seed, practice the rain, and wisdom is my yoke and plow. This is how I plow my plowing. The crop it yields is deathlessness, is awakening. And when one has plowed with this plowing, one is released from all suffering."

Striking image, don't you think? Faith as a seed. And through the practice—through the practice we're doing here—that's the rain. It naturally arises from that. We're nurturing the seed to grow towards the deathless, towards awakening.

Please keep this in mind as I speak, because I think doubt arises when we get caught up in the growth of the seed. So many times in this practice we're nurturing the seed and then we get somehow neurotic about it, feeling like we have to control the growth process. What I appreciate about this image is that controlling growth isn't our job. Our job is simply to water the seed. How do we water the seed? It's really simple: resting in this quality of awareness, of intelligence that has this quality of caring.

The other night, Joseph was speaking about another mental quality, ātāpī, usually translated as ardency, and he was likening it to falling in love. Tonight, I want to speak about faith as the process of falling in love—for a specific reason.

Faith is usually the translation of the Pāli word saddhā, Pāli being the early scriptural language of Buddhism. Saddhā literally means to put one's heart into it, or to put one's heart upon. Or, if we want a broader sense, it means to fall in love. I think this is a wonderful way to translate saddhā, because there is an emotional relationship we're trying to cultivate through faith.

Faith has to be heartfelt. Right now, you might want to take a moment to reflect: What has allowed you to fall in love with this practice? You wouldn't be here on this retreat if somehow you hadn't fallen in love with this practice. What was it? Was it possibly a teacher that inspired you, or a community that inspired you, or the teachings themselves? What allowed you to fall in love with the practice? Or maybe it was your own direct experience of how the Dharma has unfolded in your life, your own direct experience of the

fruits of this practice—like that quality of the Dharma that Carol mentioned last night: *Ehi Passiko*, come see for yourself. This is one of the qualities of the Dharma, that we come and see for ourselves how this practice unfolds. And that's the true way that faith unfolds.

This is really the unique flavor of faith on this path. This is not a blind faith. It's a faith that is sometimes also translated as confidence—a confidence that arises from our meditation practice.

Faith is like falling in love. But like falling in love, faith, if it's unskillfully placed—the way I unskillfully placed it in my practice—can carry all kinds of deluded projections, just like the projections we carry when we fall in love. Has anyone here ever fallen in love and gotten wrapped up in those crazy projections that fill your mind about the other person? Or am I the only one? A few. It's wild what happens, isn't it? There is something magical about it, but the thoughts that start to swirl around in our minds when we fall in love—have you noticed that? *Oh, this is going to be the best relationship. It's going to bring me all kinds of happiness.* And even deeper down, what often motivates this is the belief that this person is going to make me feel whole. They're going to take away these feelings that I don't like anymore. This is *the* relationship. This is my soulmate. Have you ever noticed what happens to those relationships? Sometimes they're filled with lots of dukkha.

Actually, the same thing can happen within our practice, where we can approach the practice with these qualities of delusion—like the ones I was talking about in my story. This idea that somehow I'm going to move from being a person where I feel like there's something wrong with me into a person where I feel perfect and whole. That's delusion. That's trying to replace one sense of self for another sense of self. And what we're trying to cut through is creating any kind of sense of self at all—seeing that whatever sense of self we create, there's a quality of unsatisfactoriness there.

Let me go a little more deeply with this. I'd like to share with you an image, an image that was proposed to describe love between two people. It comes from a Platonic dialogue called the *Symposium*. I don't know if anyone, back in their perhaps long-ago days, has read the *Symposium*. This Platonic dialogue is basically a story that Plato tells. It's the story of a group of men—of course Socrates is included—who get together for a symposium. In ancient Greece, a symposium was a drinking party. So they're getting together to drink and to talk about love. What they did is they all went around, and each person gave their description of what they thought love was.

The second person to speak, early in the night, was Aristophanes. Aristophanes was a playwright who wrote a number of comedies in ancient Greece. And please remember, when I share this story with you, that in ancient Greece, comedies were really the darkest view one could have of human nature. Aristophanes was very skilled at expressing this view.

This is the story he tells of love. He said that long ago, we were these creatures—these cartwheels. Two people would be stuck together. Some cartwheels had two men stuck together, other cartwheels had two women stuck together, and yet other cartwheels had a man and a woman stuck together.

And they would roll around very happily. But of course, in all Greek stories, they got a little bit arrogant and tried to fly up towards the gods. And as the gods saw this, they got incredibly angry. Zeus, of course, getting angry. And in order to punish them, he divided all these cartwheels up so that they were scattered across the world. And they were left looking all over the world for their other half so that they could once again feel whole.

What a depressing view of love.

Again, reflect on when you've gotten involved in a relationship, when you think that relationship is somehow going to complete you. We can do this with meditation practice too. We come here with a feeling of incompleteness. Something's wrong with me. And there's some hope that if I practice hard enough, the practice will take that experience away from me.

But please remember, that experience of incompleteness or something wrong with me—what is it? It's just a conglomeration of sensations, of thoughts and feelings that have congealed together, that will arise and pass away. And the amazing thing about the teaching of the Buddha is that he was not proposing that we try to create another kind of self to help cure this self that we don't like. He was asking us to see through this concoction that we create called a self.

And again, how do you do that? It's doing what you're doing on this retreat. Coming back to the simplicity of this practice. That's it. It's so simple what we're doing here. This awareness—this awareness with intelligence and caring—coming back to that again and again and again.

The essence of this practice of resting in awareness is far simpler than becoming somebody. Can you hear just the power in that? When you're aware, you get to sidestep that whole mess of trying to get out of being a certain self and trying to move into another kind of self. It just doesn't work. That's the cycle of suffering—when we get lost in this trying to become.

That's why I appreciate this simple quote from Ajahn Sumedho. He says, "The personality never gets enlightened." I think that's an important thing to remember. So we're placing our attention in the correct place, which is this simple awareness of what's going on right now, what's arising and passing away, rather than getting lost in this project, like I was doing during that first year of being a monastic.

So within this delusion, what we can find is what arises is doubt. And I want to speak about this because this is the thing that can undermine faith. You might notice that what is often within doubt is expectation. It's some kind of wanting or not wanting.

What are some forms this can take? There can be these small forms of doubt, such as the belief, "If only I was doing the practice correctly, maybe this pain would go away." Or, "I must not be doing the practice correctly because I'm still in pain." Or we blame it on the practice: "This practice must not be working because I still have that pain in my back. And not only that, it's increasing."

And you can, of course, place in there all different kinds of states of mind—boredom, agitation, the scattered mind, frustration. There's a subtle expectation. There can be this subtle expectation that if I do this practice, then I will have all these pleasant results. You ever notice your mind do this? That's the setup for doubt, because there's an expectation in there.

And yes, there's a caveat to this. There is a place for discernment, for skillful discernment to help us really cultivate and open up the space for this quality of awareness that we're trying to develop. There are small things that we can tinker with. But this is different than getting lost in the cloud of doubt. Discernment has a quality of clarity to it. Doubt doesn't. Have you noticed the difference in the feeling quality between both of those? It's something to become curious about.

So I want to go back to faith, because I think this helps us clarify what faith really is. Faith is like falling in love, as I was talking about, or confidence. A confidence and a falling in love without expectation. Yes, we can have this aspiration to awaken, to heal. But can you engage in that without some kind of grasping expectation intermeshed with it?

I want to say a little bit more about expectation and how to deal with expectations in our practice, because as I was mentioning, this is what I feel can underlie doubt. Please remember—I think this is very important to remember—that we don't know how this practice is supposed to unfold on a day-to-day basis. And notice there can be this quality of mind, this state of mind that actually really thinks it does know. Have you noticed this dynamic? A part of the mind that feels like it does know how this practice is supposed to unfold. And then when it doesn't unfold that way, it's disappointed.

One story about this, which I have found helpful to keep in mind on retreats, is a Zen story. There was a young monk by the name of Fa Yan. Fa Yan was traveling, and this was very common in China, to travel from temple to temple as part of one's spiritual path, as part of one's practice. One would travel to a temple, practice there for a while, and then journey on to another temple. On his way, he met a Zen master, Dizong. The Zen master asked Fa Yan, "Where are you going?" Fa Yan was a good monk. I really appreciate his replies. He says, "On pilgrimage, wherever my feet take me."

Right there, we can hear—I don't know if you can hear the wisdom in Fa Yan's practice. Very clear. He's on pilgrimage. Where is he going? Wherever his feet take him. There's already not this grasping for some expectation. But luckily, Dizong is a good Zen master. He's always trying to catch the young monk. So he asks, "What do you expect from pilgrimage?" And Fa Yan says, "I don't know." Dizong actually compliments him and says, "Ah, not knowing is most intimate."

Can you allow for that quality of intimacy within your practice—to not know how it's going to unfold? To simply allow your feet to take you however they do and to not know how it's going to unfold? Because when we're traveling on pilgrimage, when you're on this path during these six weeks or three months, there are going to be sunny days and there are going to be cloudy days. It's just the way the weather is. What would it be like to stop trying to forecast the weather or even try to change the weather? What

would it be like to simply allow your feet to take you wherever they go and to not know how the path unfolds? Those feet of awareness—awareness that's infused with intelligence and caring.

When I was in Burma, I was told this kind of gossip that would go around. I think it's quite well-known gossip. It said that Burmese women, usually from the village more so than women from the city, are really the practitioners with the deepest faith. Their practice, compared to other practitioners—especially practitioners from the West—unfolds much more dramatically and deeply than definitely Westerners or Burmese men or Burmese women from the city. What's said is the reason for that is because they have such deep faith. It's really quite fascinating.

What they do is they go and see a Sayadaw, and the Sayadaw tells them how to practice. And what do they do? They practice. They don't think about it. They don't entertain any kinds of doubts. They simply surrender themselves to the practice. They don't worry about what the weather is every day. They don't have a mind that tries to forecast it. Can we allow space for that quality of mind within our practice? Practice without expectation, not even the expectation of any kind of results. Of course, still the aspiration for healing, for awakening, but without the expectation or the hope for results.

Another story that I carry with me, that I find inspiring in terms of this, that gives me a sense of what deep faith is, is about a man by the name of Vedran Smailović. Some of you might have heard his name before. He was a cellist, and in the early nineties he was living in Sarajevo. If you remember, in the early 1990s there was the siege of Sarajevo, where Serbian forces surrounded the city.

And it was really a horrible situation. It went on for years. What the Serbian forces were doing was twofold, and this was on a daily basis. First, they cut off electricity and water and tried to seal off the city. Then they would shell the city most every day. This was just the constant reality for the residents of Sarajevo. And not only that, they had snipers situated on the outskirts of the city, so wherever you were walking, you never knew if you were in the sights of a sniper or not. They would just pick people off during the siege.

And Vedran Smailović had the idea that he would play his cello. He played it in all kinds of places—in the streets, at funerals, in bomb shelters, in bombed-out buildings. He was playing it in a city that was under siege. The thing that strikes me about this story is I don't think he was asking, "Is this helping or not?" What was important was his dedication to play and the faith that somehow, somehow, that was going to allow for a change, that somehow that was going to help the people of Sarajevo.

What would it be like to have that kind of faith, that kind of trust in simply being aware? Not being concerned about how it's going to play out, but knowing somewhere deep inside that it's going to have a profound effect in your life and in the lives of others. How? I don't know. To hold the not knowing as well as the faith. Can you have that quality of faith within your practice—the kind of faith that Vedran Smailović must have had to play the cello for four years in all these places while his city was under siege?

So what should we do in our practice when our expectations do get the better of us? In other words, how can you work with doubt? What can help with doubt, this doubt that can undermine our faith?

A few things. One is it can be so powerful just to come to the point of being able to say, "Oh, this is doubt." Just to have that clarity and to name it or label it or at least know it—that it's simply that, nothing more. Or as Joseph was mentioning this morning, dividing up the thought, seeing the component aspects of it, seeing the words that arise in the mind and the images that conglomerate together to give this feeling, and also the emotions that conglomerate together to give the feeling of the doubt. To divide it into these component parts. To see the details of it and how it arises and passes away. Simply being with those aspects, those component parts of doubt—that's one thing that can really help.

I also want to point out that doubt can be incredibly tricky, just like the other hindrances. Doubt is the fifth of the five hindrances and can be very slippery. But all the hindrances can have this quality that when we're practicing, we don't see them clearly. And it can happen to all of us.

One story about this: the Venerable Anuruddha, one of the Buddha's disciples, went to one of the Buddha's chief disciples, Sāriputta, for advice. He said, "You know, I don't know what's going on with my practice. Here I am, I've got this divine eye—remember, I have this divine eye where I can see throughout the world. And not only that, when I check in, I have this unremitting energy, this energy that's just fueling my practice. And of course what comes with that is this very alert mindfulness. And the mind feels concentrated. But the thing is, I don't get it. I don't know why I'm not completely awake yet. Why haven't I let go of all the fetters of the mind?"

Sāriputta says to him, "Well, what's really going on is this: this sense that you have of your divine eye—that's conceit. And that unremitting energy that you have—that's actually restlessness. And all this talk about how you're not enlightened—I'd call that worry."

And of course the Venerable Anuruddha was very happy to hear this and was able to see these states of mind more clearly, and as a result was able to move towards awakening.

It's true, we can get lost in these hindrances. So we do our best to be aware and to report clearly to the teachers. I think that's the wonderful thing, especially about the teachers that all of you have on this retreat. They're incredibly insightful.

And to make best use of the interviews when you have them.

Now we have to come to the question: faith in what? What do you have faith in? Where should we place our faith?

Again, another story illustrates this, because I think it clarifies a quality of faith that you find in early Buddhism—a quality that actually changes as Buddhism moves through different countries. This is the story of a monastic by the name of the Venerable Vakkali.

Vakkali one day was sick, and the Buddha decided to go and see him. When Vakkali sees the Buddha, he says, "For a long time, Lord, I've wanted to come and set eyes on the Blessed One, but I had not the strength in this body to come and see the Blessed One."

And it's interesting how the Buddha replies to him. He says, "Enough, Vakkali. What is there to see in this body of mine? He who sees Dhamma, Vakkali, sees me. He who sees me sees Dhamma. Truly seeing Dhamma, one sees me. Seeing me, one sees the Dhamma."

So in early Buddhism, it's very clear that this is not about having this kind of guru relationship with a teacher. There's this clarity that the teacher is there to help one start to have faith and devotion in the Dhamma. I think this is really wonderful and striking to see in early Buddhism. The Buddha is really clear about where one should place one's attention.

So how do we have faith in the Dhamma? What does that look like? I think there are many ways, but I'm just going to mention two that might speak to you personally—two things that I think are quite important in terms of having faith in the Dhamma.

The first one is having faith in our own ability to wake up. I feel like this is very important. And I want to share with you a passage by Annie Dillard. She's going to be using more Christian language here, but I think it speaks to our situation as well.

She asks this question: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place?" To me, she's asking: who will awaken? Who is it that will awaken? And she answers: "There is no one but us. There is no one to send, nor a clean hand, nor a pure heart on the face of the earth, nor in the earth, but only us—a generation comforting ourselves with the notion that we have come at an awkward time, that our innocent fathers are all dead, as if innocence had ever been. But there is no one but us. There never has been."

Do you hear what she's trying to convey here? In this statement that there's no one but us? We can get this idea that awakening and liberation, that freedom—it's for those monastics, those monks and nuns in Asia that have the quote-unquote "pure heart," or that are somehow innocent, that they're not like me, they're not like us. And what is she saying here? There's never been such a thing as a pure heart or innocence. There's only been people like us who have awakened.

I feel like this is so important to remember. Sometimes I remember seeing my own mind do this. Sometimes I hear these inspiring, even amazing stories of practitioners that seem inhuman, superhuman. And of course my mind takes that and thinks, "Well, that means that awakening is only for these people that have some kind of pure heart or innocence or a diligence that I don't have."

So I think it's very important to dispel that notion if it arises in your mind and to remember: there's no one but us that can awaken. Can you begin to have faith and confidence in that? Liberation is possible for all of us here.

Where else can we place our faith? I think the other place is the one I keep mentioning: placing your faith in the simple practice of being aware, of really knowing one's experience moment after moment after moment. I feel this is important—to cultivate the trust and confidence in that, to really begin to find your home in awareness.

Have you noticed where your mind likes to find its home? Where is your mind trying to find home during the day? It might be in figuring out, or planning, or analyzing, or simply thinking. Have you noticed where your mind is trying to create a home?

Or a lot of times the mind is just trying to create some kind of sense of solid self to make it feel secure, to find a home there.

There's actually nothing wrong with planning and figuring out and analyzing. But can you notice it from the home of awareness? Can you trust in that, in the simplicity of this practice? Have you noticed, when there really starts to be a rhythm with the practice, how simple it is? It really is. And what the problem is, really, is the complications—the complications and the concoctions that the mind creates around it, and getting lost in those.

A lot of times, once that faith begins to develop, you might notice that there's more and more of this quality of surrendering. Not so much doing the practice, but surrendering to the practice. Allowing the practice to move through you rather than the sense of "I'm doing the practice." I feel like that's one of the gifts of faith—it can really begin to wash away the sense of "I am doing the practice."

I remember the first time I went to Burma. Before I went there, I was nervous. I was going to practice at Panditarama and then Samanganana, and I was going to be practicing with Sayadaw U Pandita. I'd heard a lot of stories about Sayadaw U Pandita. Some were really great, and some were just horrific. So I was nervous.

I remember calling a friend who had spent years living in Burma, solely practicing with Sayadaw U Pandita. I said, "What do I need to remember about practice?" I so appreciated his advice. He said, "You know what? It's so simple there. They feed you. All you need to do is sit when it's time to sit, walk when it's time to walk, go to the bathroom when it's time to go to the bathroom. There's just a simple awareness of all of it, and then you report it to your teacher. That's it. Don't worry. It's that simple."

When I was in Burma, I always came back to that whenever I would be freaking out about something. I'd come back to, "Oh yeah, what did my friend tell me? This is it. Just the simple awareness of whatever's arising right now."

The last arena I want to share some reflections on is how to approach difficulties within our practice—just because difficulties as a whole, especially the difficulties that overwhelm us, can undermine faith. Difficulty is the thing that can allow doubt to begin to arise. Of course, there's the simple practice of being with those difficulties, but you might notice that it's not so easy at times. It's much easier to talk about.

That's the nice thing about being up here—to talk about it, make it sound really simple. It really isn't. It's difficult at times.

These are some things that have helped me. One is an image I got from a writer by the name of Simone Weil. I don't know if any of you read the writings of Simone Weil. She was a Christian mystic who also wrote a lot of different philosophical writings. So of course she's using language in terms of Christianity, but I think it fits well for our practice.

For Simone Weil, one of the problematic things she was faced with in her spiritual path was always feeling separate from God. It was this feeling of severe separation, of isolation—which I think is interesting because that's also a modern dilemma. But that's for another dharma talk.

She came up with this wonderful image of how the spiritual path works. She says the separation—the separation from God, or for the intents and purposes of this retreat, the separation from our practice—is actually the link. The separation is the link.

She gives this image of two prisoners in prison cells with a wall that separates them. Yet once they start to knock on the wall, the wall itself becomes the link between them. At first, when they come into the prison cells, the wall is that which separates. But then, when they come into a skillful relationship with the wall, it links them. It brings relationship. The separation is the link.

Can you have faith and trust that the things that feel like they're separating you from your practice are actually linking you to it?

A lot of times this is very true—even with all the hindrances and things that arise, when you bring awareness to them, it allows us to link back into our practice. Can you move towards anything that feels like it's separating you from your practice and discover that it's actually linking you through awareness?

The poet Pesha Gertler puts this well in her poem "The Healing Time." She begins:

Finally, finally on my way to yes,
I bump into all the places where I said no to my life.

I have to stop there just because I think that's a great opening line. "Finally, I'm finally on my way to yes, and then I bump into all the places where I said no to my life." Have you ever experienced that? It's called meditation. It can really have that feeling at times—at least in the dark times.

So again:

Finally on my way to yes,
I bump into all the places where I said no to my life,
all the untended wounds,
the red and purple scars,

those hieroglyphs of pain
carved into my skin, my bones,
those coded messages
that send me down the wrong street again and again
where I find them,
the old wounds,
the old misdirections.
And I lift them
one by one close to my heart
and I say, holy, holy.

Can your difficulties, can your wounds turn out to be that which is holy?

So just to review: faith, this quality of *saddhā*. Remember it's like falling in love, and be aware of those delusions that can follow when we fall in love. And doubt—within doubt, be sensitive to expectation. Can you cultivate this quality of not knowing? A not knowing that's most intimate. Not knowing specifically in terms of how the path unfolds. And even not having expectation around result, like the cellist of Sarajevo, Vedran Smailović. And may the separations in your practice—may you see that they're the link, just like those two prisoners and the wall.

May the arising of faith in all of our practices go towards the liberation of all beings.

Thank you.

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