

2004-05-19 Foundations of Buddhist Spiritual Life: Cultivation (Week 4 Part 2)

Wed, 7/22 10:53AM • 34:43

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

cultivating, develop, concentration, important, people, confidence, capacity, practice, mode, feels, mindfulness, nurture, utilitarian, nurturing, cultivation, discerning, effort, appreciative, catch, person

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So in Buddhist practice, we don't leave our mental capacities to chance, just whatever happens to appear one day, we just kind of contempt with that, or whatever our net, you know what we're born with that go along with that. But we take our capacities that we have, and we try to develop them, to strengthen them. And I think, very useful for us to kind of look at this and kind of begin this kind of exploration is this list that is called the five faculties and which are these five that I talked about? fit confidence, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment. Usually translate this wisdom when you discern discernment is a better translation. And to have to be discerning about the presence or absence of these things and the relative strength of them to be mindful of what they are and then to be discerning. Whether you need to cultivate them more, some people need to develop more confidence in themselves, or confidence in the practice, or confidence in the teaching or the teacher or something. without, you know, they can feel his lack of confidence and doubt they're in that doubt. And that lack of confidence can stand in the way of really wholeheartedly making the effort to practice. So it's really helpful to have good confidence. And so cultivating confidence can be done. There's ways of developing it. Some of them are connected to faith, having a lot of inspiration, what you do, and a lot of the faith and the value of yourself and what you're doing in your activity. Some of them some of these have to do with trust, having some deep trust in them. It's possible. But I think confidence is a very good word, it kind of feels like a capacity. And so develop confidence in ourselves. And one way to do that is, is actually to begin appreciating small steps of how we can do things to you know, take a small step right do that, then allow that allow that translates in confidence. I know I can do that small thing. And small, small little steps, you know, you keep developing yourself, you get more and more confidence in what you can do. If, you know, if you're afraid to talk to strangers, then it might be you know, you go and perhaps the first thing you do is you talk to your neighbor who's not really a stranger, but, you know, it's safe to talk to your neighbor. And then you go up to the person who's one house further away. And then one house further away, or slowly, kind of, until you're, you know, two

miles away and talking to them you never seen before. Kind of maybe a silly example, but you kind of you develop your call, you can develop your confidence a small bit, by acting by doing to sit down and say, I need to develop myself, my self worth or my self esteem in the abstract, you know, by by positive thinking and all that might not be so useful, but to develop confidence by doing Doing something and then seeing you can do it. Oh, yeah, I can do the No, no, I can do that. I think that's much more realistic in the long term. So start small, and then start cultivating greater and greater sense of confidence in yourself. energy and effort, you know, can be cultivated and developed. a certain degree effort is self perpetuating. Maybe not initially, but if you keep making effort and constant consistent about it, it becomes easier and easier. It's kind of like almost like a self generates after a while. And so it's very important to make effort because making effort takes more effort, effort or energy possible in the future. But efforts also was like a muscle you know, if I know from times that I've taken up running as a as an activity, you know, the first days or weeks it feels like there's so much inertia so hard for 300 yards or even just like, like my leg, my body feels like lead and then at some point after a few weeks Running whatever. At some point, it becomes easier and easier after a while it's like it feels almost effortless. My body isn't so heavy anymore. Just kind of like the energy, the effort is kind of flowing in a nice way. I built up with breathing and all kinds of things and it goes nice. So efforts and energy can be developed in meditation just like anything else. And if the energy is not good to things that cultivating and develop that mindfulness develop, that's a big part of what the IMC the center here is about is cultivating, developing mindfulness. It's a capacity and concentration is capacity. And the two of mindfulness of concentration are probably the two most important things to be developed in terms of inner cultivation in Buddhism.

And I wouldn't want to say one is more important than the other. Both of them are maybe equally important. And, and for some people, it's more interesting to start by cultivating mindfulness and then After World develop concentration, some people, they like to develop concentration first. And if they feel the mind is too unusable because it's so scattered. And then other people will do concentrated practices and really develop a concentration, I'll go through periods of time, where in my practice, you know, still to this day, you know, Oh, I think I need to work my concentration some more here and tune it up a little bit. Then I'll spend a few weeks doing concentration practice more than mindfulness practice, the. And then discernment is the capacity we can use. Kind of like our using our intelligence using our intelligence, doesn't matter how intelligent you are, but using it, using our capacity to evaluate and make decisions to see what's useful, what's helpful and not helpful and apply ourselves not just to kind of sit back and say whatever goes goes, but to be discerning about what needs to happen here. If there's not, if there's not much energy for meditation practice, and maybe do walking meditation first to build up some energy in the body. Fast walking Efficiency comes down with energy. And that's it a certain process of discernment discerning what's needed here. So the sermon is in recognizing what you need to do. And a lot of you know, December's a really important part of Buddhist practice. If you get a better sense of it, or the importance when you realize that it's usually translated by the word wisdom. I like the word discernment. It can seem like a lot of doing when we talk about the path of cultivation, cultivating concentration, cultivating mindfulness, cultivating confidence, cultivating different things, cultivating our capacity for loving kindness, for patience for

equality. So long list of things you can cultivate. It can seem like a lot of doing and then people get into kind of manipulative mode and kind of trying to have agendas in front of you trying to control what happens and measuring how they're doing and disappointed with you have expectations and then expectations and live up to it. And then we compare, compare ourselves to other people, you know, like, she's more concentrated than me and how could that be and this is embarrassing. And so it lends itself to a lot of unhealthy activity. When we start collecting, you know this path of cultivation developing ourselves. Remember you supposed to stay happy. So stay with me bring a Lightness of Being as you do this. So you don't want to take this too seriously. We had a good time while you do it. I know Buddhist, some Buddhist occasionally can't get through him. You know, bear down and concentrated. And the better Buddhist you are, the less you're a Buddhist,

lighter and lighter. Certainly can be exhausting this idea of cultivation and yours doing but I'd like to offer you a perspective on it that hopefully is helpful. There are two general modes of how to engage in spiritual practice. As many ways of parsing it out and dividing it up, but for now I'll say two different general modes. One is what I call the utilitarian mode. And the other is the appreciative mode. And the utilitarian mode, it very clearly has a goal. It's about getting someplace making something happen is pragmatic, utilitarian, this is useful for getting to a goal. The appreciative mode is much more about how we are rather than focusing on the goal, how we are while we engage in the process of getting someplace. So if you want to go from here to the train station, utilitarian mode might be let's just figure out how to get there as fast as we possibly can. And so, but the the, the appreciative mode might still want to get there fast, but efficient mode realizes how you get there is as important as getting there. And so you know, you want to be able to walk in such a way that you enjoy yourself if you don't get tense and you don't get blisters on your feet and you know, and you kind of open and run As you do it, the how you are, is is extremely important part of spiritual life. And if we lose track of how sacrificed the how, because we're focused on a goal or focusing on what or who we are, then I think we lose a spiritual life. I think it's really important. How am I right now? What am I doing? How am I? Is there patience? Is there kindness? Is there equanimity? Is there some peacefulness is there some generosity, you know how we are, is more important than what we do. Having a generous jet. being generous person is more important than acts of generosity. Being a kind person is more important than acts of kindness. If you have that confused, it can be actually problematic. Trying to do kind acts without really having a kind heart. So the house so the appreciative mode is more about the how, and the utilitarian mode is more about the goal. The utilitarian mode is more about manipulating controlling acquiring, making something happen. The appreciative mode is more about tending and nurturing. And both of them you know, like, like, like, you know, if you want to example use a lot is if you want to grow corn, you know and you're impatient how quickly the corn seedlings going, you want to see how it's going and encourage it along so you pull the seedling out of the ground to see how it's growing. Well, that's nice to know. But that's it for the corn seedlings you can't it's very hard to transplant a corn sitting back back again to make it grow. You have to kind of nurture it along kind of trust it's gonna grow and nurtured and give water and tend to it in a nice way. But you don't want just kind of Chuck pulling on it, you know, make it go faster, faster by pulling on it. So the wheel, the idea is not to be caught up in control and manipulation and acquisition and getting but rather the idea is to be more

tending or nurturing in the practice. The work we're doing If you still kind of tend to nurture things along, but you're not goal oriented, you know, so you're focusing on the goal at the expense of everything else. You're not your egos not tied into it, you know, you know, your expectation and it's not such a big part of it's more like oh, you know, nurture you attend you along as we go along. They call it the developmental model of spiritual life. It's very much like a developmental developmental model of childhood. In its own time, children learn certain things. Don't there's no real value, apparently, to rushing. There's a big push now and get kids to read during reading in kindergarten. And some kids are ready and some are not and the kids are not, you know, struggle. It's hard for them. And it doesn't seem to be any real advantage as far as people, but people I read, study, say, you know, just let kids kind of develop in their own time that sooner or later they'll be ready to learn to read. Don't push it. It's like and I sometimes try to push my son developmentally, like A story I told the other night of, of trying to teach him how to catch a baseball. It's pretty good but he didn't want to catch a baseball was straight up in the air. So like, while going broke his head, he kind of like, couldn't quite do it because he and I tried to teach him and he just protested and got upset with me upset with himself. Because, you know, I thought so easy, right. And for him, it was impossible. And there was no need to have been pushing him to teach him this because I just backed up eventually. And then after a couple of months, he's doing Arizona, we play catch all the time and slowly slowly, you know, developmentally he learns how to do it on his own.

Parents are impatient. Parents are utilitarian, you know, and what we need to do is be more of the appreciative mode and kind of the nurturing and encouraging the child. Let's go play catch, it's good. Let's play catch. That's great what you did, and then eventually you'll learn how to do it. So the same thing with a spiritual life. I think it flows a lot better with the appreciative mode, the nurturing models nurture something. So we have some in a concentration utilitarian motives like to do or to make a concentrated bear down. The appreciative mode is more like, Oh yeah, let's kind of encourage this along here. Let's not be so goal oriented, let's not focus too much. Let's trust the developmental approach. If I just keep working on my concentration and nurturing it along and be consistent, make efforts sometimes strong effort to keep it up, then eventually, you know, the development will happen. I don't know when for some people will happen don't happen in two days, and some people happens in two years. Who knows when it's gonna happen for you. But they have the confidence and the trust that your it will happen as you develop and slowly, they have the patience if it takes two years to do the two year approach. What and part of the reason why this appreciative mode is so important in spiritual life, is that some of the fruits of the spiritual life are things that we can't really make happen. Some of the greatest things it's kind of like Think it's probably true for most of us true for most of you, you know, we can lay yourself down in bed to go sleep. But can you make yourself asleep? I can't do it at least I tried for years. And there's sometimes it's, you know, it's, you know, I can't go to sleep at all, you know, and I go to sleep, you know, how do you do that, you know, lay there really still and, you know, count the sheep and, you know, how does that happen? And I haven't figured out how to how to make it happen, you know, I just have to kind of get out of the way to relax and not think about it and not try. And then, you know, just kind of lay there still and be quiet. I don't know and then somehow happens. Some people are really good meditators apparently can kind of track really close to a

moment of falling asleep, but I just, I just wake up What happened? But anyway, you can kind of put yourself to bed which can make you asleep. You can receive praise from people you can manipulate situation and get praise from people. But can you can't force people to admire you You can acquire a lot of knowledge. But you can't force yourself to have wisdom. You know, you don't get wisdom by reading a lot of books. Certain things in life, you don't get by acquiring it getting in manipulated, controlling, it's more kind of suddenly gets boring, it's kind of cultivated, to create the right conditions for it to happen. You have to support and nurture it along. But it's something other than you that makes it happen. So much of the spiritual isn't that the fruits of spiritual life more in that kind of mode. So the fact that cultivation is very important, but we, how we, how we do it, how we engage in it is very important for him to have a good time doing it, enjoy and appreciate it. Appreciate or find satisfaction in it, even when it's really hard. Emphasis on making that happiness doesn't mean you're always happy. You know, you know if you're feeling depressed or filled with grief or anger or some fake big thing, It doesn't mean that you're a bad Buddhist because you're not happy. But it means that you find happiness, certain kind of funny happiness, knowing I have a practice, I can engage with this I can, I don't have to be a victim of how I'm feeling, I can have a practice I can, it's satisfying to have this practice I can do in this time of crisis or difficulty. So the appreciative mode, as we cultivate and develop ourselves, the human mind, the human heart, is not a thing. It's a process, or it's a series of cognitive processes that work together. And because it's the processes, those processes can be changed. If the mind was a solid block of granite or titanium or something, you're not going to be able to do much to you know, unless you kind of take a chiseler atomic bomb or something and really feels that way sometimes. But the human mind is not fixed and solid. It's actually a process a whole bunch of processes. We can change and shift how those processes work. We can cultivate and develop ourselves and doing starting very small and doing small steps can have a huge impact in two years and five years in 10 years. I think I mentioned that maybe the first night, I mentioned that a lot of gifts get you the, the, the telephone book thing for yoga. So right to get the very small changes to everyday can make a big difference in the long term, certain things

or jumpstart it or kind of when you go to the gym, a Buddhist, the Buddhist gym is going on retreats. So do a day long retreat, for example, would you attend a retreat or a weekend retreat, it gives you kind of a really great opportunity to really apply yourself just like you would go to the gym, just kind of work on your concentration, work on your concentration, kind of an uninterrupted way for days on end. And it can be a great way of developing and strengthening it. And then when you leave the retreat Hopefully you have a little bit more capacity to concentrate or be mindful. Practicing every day, you know, sitting every day, even if it's just half an hour, you know, will build momentum over time build strength over time. One of my favorite quotes to the Buddha go something like goes drop by drop. The water jug is filled. We might say drop by drop, the swimming pool is filled. Don't underestimate the tremendous value of a single drop. When it goes together with a lot of other drops of follow it. A single drop of mindfulness, a single drop of concentration that's kept up over time, can fill up the whole bathtub can be huge, really change who we are in a big way. I offer you those five areas of your life that you might explore. Think about talk to friends about what they think about these five areas, these five faculties. And then think a little bit for this extra next week about how you might realistically nurture

and support along the deepening or the strengthening of your confidence of your capacity for effort and energy, of your capacity for attention, mindfulness, for your capacity for concentration or stability of mind, and your capacity of using your intelligence in a useful way, and be to be discerning about what's going on know, you discern between what's helpful or not helpful, and that's what I offer you as a homework. When a person works with a Buddhist teacher, and the teacher knows them relatively well and knows kind of what's going on for them in their spiritual life. A teacher might suggest that the person called Particular quality. Because they feel that's what's most needed in order to bring their life for the spiritual practice into balance. It might be any one of the five faculties that I mentioned. But it could be other things. It could be, for example, cultivating generosity. It could be cultivating patience. It could be cultivating equanimity. It could be cultivating our capacity to be disciplined. our capacity to have resolved determination. It could be cultivating our what are some good ones? Someone helped me out. loving kindness, cultivating compassion. It's really important. Anyway, so depending on you know, so sometimes people will work on certain things for some some time, because it's needed and sometimes Buddhist teacher can really help you with that. It's one of the reasons why they kind of spend time with the teacher and have interviews occasionally to get guidance. Oh yeah, I think you should cultivate that develop that. Have you tried developing that yet? Have you done that? No, haven't tried to try that for a few months and see what that's like and might support you and help you out. So those are my thoughts for tonight. So we have about 10 minutes. And if you have some questions, this would be a great time, voice said, or reservations or anything at all. You'd like to say? Yes.

Well, depends what you're trying to cultivate what you might do. So for example, if you're going to cultivate generosity, you might actually want to act on it. You know, you know, you might want to go and, you know, think of some various things to do for friends, neighbors, strangers that are generous, and actually try to act done it. And that's how you cultivate is by acting like you might also spend some time reflecting on it and thinking about it talking to friends and nature of generosity with generosity feels like the value of generosity in that kind of reflection will strengthen, develop it inspire you with it in some way. It might require looking at since a miser miserliness or greedy greed or clinging or, or that person might have to look okay, I want to cultivate generosity. But I think what I need to do really look is look at the way that I'm kind of stingy and explore that. Some things maybe are cultivated, like equanimity. Sometimes it's cultivated by developing kind of overview of the situational field situation, the big picture. And so you need to call and cultivate them to figure out how do I get this big picture What's going on here? It's not all about me, myself and myself with more going on. So I thought that was a good answer, but depending on what Trying to cultivate there's many, many different approaches to how you might do if you don't want to have just one way. Right?

Let's get them caught us a concentration in Buddhism is extremely important. The faculty of the mind we want to develop and really the depths of Buddhist practice in our tradition are not really possible unless a person cultivates a fair amount of concentration. You can get a lot of benefits from Buddhism without, you know, going all the way with it. But But concentration is really important. Concentration is not the same thing as you know, contemplating something, focusing and thinking really hard about

something It's not a it's not a cognitive thing that we do with our thoughts. It has to do with how we use our attention. So for example, if you're driving your car, you have to be caught, you have to, you don't necessarily thinking about all the cars, and that's a blue car and red car. But rather, you're concentrating on the road in front of you, mostly, you know, you kind of concentrate on driving. And if you're the passenger in a car, and someone is not concentrating on the driving, you probably tell them or asked to get out. It's kind of ability to be focused, you know, and not be scattered and distracted a lot. So, one way of defining concentration is, is the opposite of being distracted. So the kind of stability of the mind and the attention, the attention will stay, stay still. So one of the ways to cultivate one of the ways cultivated more directly, is you take your attention and you hold it to one thing without letting it waiver waivers, you bring it back. So the breath for example, is going to stay with each breath. One breath and the other one breath and they're they're not gonna let the mind After breath, you might be aware of other things and thoughts on the side and the periphery. But you're not going to you're not going to leave that breath. And if you do that over time you develop concentration. What some people like to do that with counting the breath, that's another aid to counter breaths, little extra help them to kind of keep you on track and you have to be you have to be concentrated to count. Otherwise you lose count. Does that help? Other things? Yes.

Haven't really practiced today Deva.

So the question is someone so much you heard someone say that Buddhist practice, it's not about getting rid of anything with rather I suppose just being mindful of it and really clearly seeing what's there and not clear mindfulness to become free of it, that doesn't necessarily go away or pushing anything away. And so for today, we talked about cultivation developing. So what do you do when you develop your generosity and you feel yourself stingy? You let go the stinginess or you somehow accommodate it and kind of, you know, how do you how do you relate to it? Remember what I said earlier, it's not this thing. There's not always so anybody offers one thing, this is what Buddhism is. It says, It's not about letting go. You can say, Well, sometimes I get it is. Maybe most of the time it's not but sometimes it is or maybe in some situations it's not. But sometimes it is okay to let go. Get rid of. There's a place from, you know, time and season for everything kind of thing, right? There's a, there's a, sometimes the way mindfulness practice is taught. And it's a very powerful way of practicing it is you don't try to get rid of anything, you don't try to let go of anything. You let everything be. And you rely on the tremendous power of mindfulness and honesty. Truth is liberating. So if you be completely honest and see clearly what's going on, it's very, very powerful way of doing mindfulness practice. So some teachers who emphasizing that side practice will say, it's not about getting rid of anything. It's just about becoming awake to what's going on when we see it clearly. And that's a really important strategy. We teach that a lot, that kind of approach, that it's really useful to do that in practice. But it's also times when it's very valuable to learn to let go of things. And if you want to call it getting rid of getting rid of it has kind of connotation of pushing away or maybe aversion. And that has no place in Buddhism, with wise letting go has a place and that's the sun For next week, let it go. So if you're exhausted from the always talking about cultivation today, then next week we'll be relaxing. Like go sit back in your chair, relax, nothing to do nowhere to go, no one to be

appreciative approach thinking so I've been stressed about work a lot. Also, then it's just a gorgeous day out and I can't get my mind off work.

It might be hard, it might be that you need some break. You might need to go for a walk around the block and kind of get revived it'll be before you can really start appreciating some good qualities there. It could have been that maybe when you went to work first thing in the morning, that's when you needed to appreciate and nourish some good, good quality of your mind. And so and then to maintain it through the day and you're sacrificing your good quality quality. So what are the interesting things is that people sacrifice we sacrifice the good quality of our inner life, all the time. And what part of what Buddhism is trying to do is with the path of cultivation and just in general is trying to keep us in touch with a really good quality of being inside and discover that and develop that and strengthen that and then one of the very interesting kind of negotiations are kind of explorations is why do you sacrifice it? Why do you let yourself get stressed out or get caught up in all things have to do in the busyness and why do you lose touch with us we liquid quality, what's the what's what's more valuable in life? Having some really good quality of well being or getting the Doing the groceries as quickly as possible.

I went to Stanford I didn't do that. Oh is different there. Yeah.

founders that serve only two so far. If you really want to to excel, it's more and more about nurturing yourself and more and more about letting go of the results

along the way, you get a better result. So I didn't quite follow you when we try to recap. So you're taking some exception to my dichotomy because it seemed to black and whites in one way or the other. And that was needed in order to make good results. So you have a goal to get through engineering school, whatever. And a really good way to Excel is there some ways to have a pragmatic approach to the most pragmatic thing to do is to be relaxed and nurturing so that's nice. I mean, I don't want to have I don't want to have this sharp cutting between these two worlds I mean, the both both both of them both towards you know, in the path of cultivation, both of them are utilitarian, both are about getting to a goal. But the question is, when you want to get walk from here to the train station, both you want to get to the train station, but one person is focused and fixated on the goal. You know, the other person is interested how they get there as well. So it's not one or the other both are needed. But the agree with you that's sometimes the most useful way. Most utilitarian way is to you know, is to be relaxed

So if you want to be really utilitarian, well, then you do with the with the appreciative mode. Remember, remember, remember the saying it's not always so whenever anybody says in good about tourism, you can always point out to not always so you know, it's a bad professional man, it's really hard to be like I said, I know as soon as I say something, someone, someone's going to say, you know, you've got it wrong, you know? It's not always so. Yeah. Or then someone says something and I

go on and on what's not always so I was like this sometimes this way, sometimes that way, and this guy's not very clear. You

know, it's not always so

So it's not always so there's always not always so. So we should stop, you know, get up into a linguistic quagmire. Anyway, I hope this has been useful. And I hope that it inspired you about the value of cultivation and to develop oneself and that is something hopefully you enjoy doing, have a good time doing and find value in and take seriously and, and, and that you'll come back for next week when we let go. Thank you