

# 2011-01-03 Qualities of Faith

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faith, buddhism, freedom, people, confidence, practice, trust, life, intention, enlightenment, authentic, hospitality, suffering, clinging, compulsion, saddhā, part, grief, word, beautiful

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, I certainly wish you all a happy new year. And as a talk for this first Monday of the new year, I would like to give a talk on faith. Faith, sometimes considered in our tradition to be sometimes seen as a seed, a seed that you plant and seed that your water and that so much can grow from that seed trouble hearing out there. So, in some way, Victor to turn up on the outside, it's cranked up all the way out there. So I don't know if the button the outside can be enough on the outside what

Jim will do it.

They're all the way up. So there's not much we can do out there. You can kind of come close. Bring your chairs closer or I could I could speak louder. I didn't know what to do. There's a few seats in here. A couple of chairs in here.

There's a chairs up one chair right here in the front, right here.

So see, so faith is sometimes compared to a seed and it's a sort of seed that you can plant, nourish and grow and beautiful things can Out of the seed. It also said in Buddhism that faith, it attracts a lot of wholesome qualities, some of the healthy, beautiful qualities of heart and mind that a person can have, are attracted to faith, and they get expressed in people's lives. And faith has a really beautiful quality of mind of heart of being. And it's also one that bothers some people. Some people come to Buddhism here in the West, at least, almost intentionally to avoid faith. Because they've somehow been troubled by the way the word faith is used, and perhaps in some of the Western religions, where it's meant maybe you have to believe something blindly, a creed or a faith that doesn't seem to be quite fit in rational thought or rational belief and, and it seems like too much to have to have faith when It seems impossible to believe these things. The in thinking about it today I was reminded of a ton of the story but something I was told a long time ago about Olive growers in Greece now apparently takes olive tree a long time to bear Olive fruit that you could prefer that you can harvest and make olive oil or something. And, and I was told that there's farmers, all the farmers in Greece, sometimes in their old age, you know, there may be 60 70 years old will plant I don't know how all the trees are planted, you know, there's a seed or whether it's a, you know, cutting or something, but we'll plant a new olive tree, knowing that that olive tree will not bear fruit and that farmers lifetime And all the trees live for a long time. And so it's, you know, why would you do something is not for yourself you know why would you do something gets in a way in the future you know you can spend your time doing other things. But I associate this kind of beautiful quality, you know, your concern kind of faith movement, which is beyond your personal concerns, but connecting to your life to the life of other people to people next generations, your life to something larger here. And I think it's quite a beautiful What is that, that what

movement of heart with movement of inspiration would cause someone to be concerned for the future in that way, and to plant something that will bear fruit in the future. Faith in that it's a seed also has this aspect of something that you know, have some inspiration, some confidence that something will bear fruit in the future something good will happen in the future something or something right will happen and they will ripen for us. And sometimes faith has more to do about the possibility in the future than it has to do with this moment right here. Or maybe you have faith that if you engage this moment in the right way, something will follow something will develop and grow. And in my faith, you know, as I've encountered Buddhism, I've developed a lot of faith in the practice and the teachings, and it takes many different forms and shapes. But one of them that I still actually moves me inspires me is that I have faith in the practice of mindfulness. And then if I engage in the practice I might not see The first minute, the first hour the first day, like on a retreat or something, any benefit. But I have faith that if I just keep doing it, and just apply myself that somehow it bears fruit, something beautiful flower with it. And I've seen over and over and over again, how the engagement in it, when in the moment, it didn't seem to be any beautiful fruit. But just keep doing the continuity of it. Something moves and shifts and changes. It's quite remarkable, that I can't take credit for I mean, I can see, you know, to me say, Well, it's because I did all this, all this mindfulness practice, meditated and practice meditative practice. Therefore, I'm responsible. I have to do my part. But I can't, it doesn't feel like I'm the one who's, you know, transformed, made this change. And so it feels in some ways, non personal or transpersonal or something that I have faith in Or trusting or confidence in can kind of sort of operating and move through me with me within me. That is not the same thing as my conscious choice or my conscious, you know, organizing of things or making things happen. And so I like the word faith because it inspires me, to a great degree. It's something that warms me up quite a bit. Something that gladdens me, brings me joy and delight in a certain kind of love. To know that there's this Dharma this practice this unfolding of the heart or the mind, that can happen that I'm not exactly responsible for, except for showing up except for doing the practice moment by moment. The some people the word in Pali in the Buddhist language is saddhā and it's translated most often English is faith. But it doesn't have to be translated as faith. So if you don't like the word, I'll offer you some others. Another word is confidence, which is a nice word and confidence, you know, doesn't lend itself to some of the pitfalls, religious pitfalls that maybe faith has. So you have, we have confidence, all kinds of things so, but to have confidence in practicing the spiritual discipline, confidence in practicing mindfulness or meditation or loving kindness, confidence in the goodness of our heart, confidence in the possibility of transformation and change, confidence in the teachings of Buddhism are all that confidence can be small. And just enough, so maybe you know, you go to the bookstore and buy another book. Or it can be really powerful, so powerful, that you change your life. You know 360 degrees are completed quick turnaround of your life, where what you do with your life and becomes completely different from what it was without that confidence, you have so much confidence in becoming free so much confidence and practicing so much confidence in different values and how you have been living, that you decide to give up your job or, you know, you know, all kinds of things you might just, you know, go on a long retreat many things, many, many things you can do some people go off to Buddhism, and become you know, full time practitioners and engage in deep, deep inner work. So, confidence, you know, is, you know, just drop this motivator for people. If you don't have confidence, why would you do anything? William James, who was American psychologist philosopher, wrote about the value of faith and he said that if a person comes in Cross like a chasm that's maybe six foot big kind of Canyon or something. And they're told to jump over that chasm of six feet is the right distance Hummingbird. Right? So it's a chasm for that distance. So it will say this way, say it's two feet jump. So, you know, most people have confidence. Most people I think, who can jump, have confidence, they can jump the two feet, not a big deal, no matter how far down it goes, You jump over the two feet. You can do that. But at some point, the distance if you spread out the distance and the chasm, it gets so far, that if you believe you can't do it, you won't be able to. But if you believe you can, you can. Belief makes a difference. However, the tricky thing is at some point, the distance becomes so great Doesn't matter how much faith you have. And if

you have too much, if you have too much faith, and you jump, you're in trouble. So you have to be careful with faith. There has to be some, you know, connection between what's, you know, what's possible. But what's possible. But there's a certain kind of little segment there what's possible is only possible because your faith isn't that interesting. It's kind of a catch 22 you know, if you don't have faith in it, how do you get faith? How do you believe it?

So, faith, you know, I think as a significant role in our life. And one of the functions in Buddhism is to bring a certain degree of confidence, but also a certain degree of delight or joy or inspiration or heartfulness in the practice. Faith in Buddhism *saddhā* is sometimes referred to as, as emotional, it's kind of connecting to our emotional aspect of our being. It's supposed to be balanced with wisdom and wisdom is meant to be more intellectual in a sense. If you're only into the wisdom, part of Buddhism, then it gets too dry intellectual. But if you're only into the faith part, then it gets too emotional and wet. And the idea is to have the combination of balance of both, but but faith is what brings the warmth to the whole heartedness to it. And without being wholehearted, it's very difficult to, you know, make much leeway in this whole Buddhist enterprise. So, to help perhaps understand faith in Buddhism, it's interesting and maybe useful to take the word English word *fe* and make it into an acronym. And so the F is freedom. And this is like at the heart of what Buddhism is about. The whole purpose in which the Buddha designed his teachings or putting together was for the purpose to help people become free. Sometimes it has grand names in English like enlightenment or awakening. But it's a little bit confusing to use those kinds of terms. Because enlightenment and awakening it's a little bit hard to understand what that is. And people have these grand ideas and imaginations of what enlightenment is and how you're going to float on the cloud or walk above the water you know, or live happily ever after. I don't know what are they believe it involves some The Big Bang Theory of enlightenment, you know, you sit there quietly lightning strikes and then you know, you're enlightened. Then you can be happy ever after. So in but I think sometimes it was constant words, Lanham set themselves a lot of confusion and mysticism and stuff. But the word freedom, I feel, is much more practical. It's not so as abstract. freedom means to be free. And to be so you have to say to free of free from what are free of what. And, and so here it's very interesting to see that Buddhism emphasizes freedom from versus kind of a common American approach to freedom, which is freedom to so America you know, the freedom to speech, freedom to assembly, freedom to religion, freedom to vote, freedom to whereas other freedoms, own property, freedom to shop You know those freedoms to and people in America, certain people, but there's certainly a strand of American culture where the individual doesn't want to be limited, doesn't want to be limited by government is a popular strand in some corners. Because he wanted to limit my freedom I should be able to do on my property, whatever I want, the government shouldn't tell me what to do. And so there's kind of there's a kind of a very strong momentum in America to associate freedom with the freedom to something wrong with that. I think it's quite appropriate in many circumstances. However, if you have the freedom to shop, you'll because you have an unlimited credit card, say you know, then you will never you might never look at at what is driving you to shop. And there might be a lot of neurosis or a lot of greed or a lot of fear. That there are a lot of loneliness or many different things can drive that drive a person's desire to have and acquire and get. And, and so the momentum that the push to get and have is can be strong. And in the field insistence is eight to be freedom to Don't get in my way, then the person will never turn around and look at them, what's motivating them. And if the credit card is unlimited, there's no need to because you can just kind of shop to abandoned some people.

When the credit card runs out of money, then they get to look and they realize how addicted they are to some things. And then they can look more deeply what is it that drives them to do these kind of behaviors. So there's many behaviors we do that if we're free to do them, which has a certain joy and delight that freedom of action doing don't actually see that we're not actually that free. We're free to do.

But we're not free from our craving or clinging. We're not free from all these strong impulses. Sometimes we're deep, unconscious impulses. That gets us to act in ways that maybe later we even regret. So Buddhism puts emphasis on turning the focus inward, so that we're not. And so this is where Buddhism can sometimes use as a very strong word, I believe. It says we're not slaves, to these deep impulses of our own mind and heart that can be there. We're not slaves of greed, not slaves of hate, not split, you know, or fear. And so the idea in Buddhism is, is not to become free to do to wherever you want, but to become free of from these inner forces. Now this is very liberating because then you're not a slave, you're not contracted, you're not being forced to do things you regret, you know, being forced to do things that cause damage and damage in the world. And more importantly, when you're not living under compulsion, inner compulsion that drive our behavior, then there is much more choice and personal freedom from our psychological freedom. spiritual freedom comes when we have choice in what we do, how we act, what motivates us the motivations we follow through on and then we can be free of inhibition, for example, which can limit our freedom to do certain things. Some people are free to are afraid to speak in public. So, you know, they're, you know, some freedom to would be I don't know. You know, I don't know what it would take for some people. Maybe not Tie everybody up first, so that you're safe and speaking, and you can talk to talk to the band and, but, but free to you know be free from your inhibition, then you know you have more choice to act freely when you speak. So Buddhism hope and focus on freedom, and the possibility of becoming free or is quite immense. And you get a sense of it. When you understand how pervasive and deep compulsions are in our mind. And people that meditate can get a glimpse of this beak when they try to stop their thinking or try to stay focused on their breath. And it's not uncommon for some meditators to realize that there are kind of joke a little bit perhaps maybe not a joke that they're addicted. And that's the only way to explain this. You know, However, the drive and compulsion to get involved in thinking and, you know, I'm killing my thinker, recovering thinker. Once a thinker always a thinker, so we come to IMC for our meetings.

The so the so the idea of you know, so to get a set, you got a sense of, you know, the power of compulsion, just through meditation. As the mind gets quieter and quieter and still there, there's a people can see and also have intuition, to possibilities of being radically free. revolutionarily free from compulsion, from craving from greed, from grasping And those functions, those operations of grasping and greed and attachment and resistance and fear. They operate in a very subtle and powerful ways that lay the foundation for parts of people's personality, character, beliefs, political affiliations, you know, behavior relationships to other people. It's quite a powerful thing. What goes on? I had was meeting with someone recently who was grieving over the loss of a spouse is an unfortunate death of a spouse. And so what do you do when you're counseling someone who's grieving, still crying and, you know, they're lost, he seems quite fresh if the year ago or so. So Normally you would maybe listen to them you would normally support them make space for them tell them it's okay. This you know just allowed they don't get that kind of kind of grief counseling things. After getting to know her sometime, I pointed out and then in a carry careful and hope it was loving way that her grief was impacting pregnant it was it was was it was coming out of her conceit. Now, isn't that a powerful thing to tell someone who's grieving loss of a spouse? You know you're conceited? You know, usually don't say that. But I can get away with that. You know, because, you know, that's kind of like the part of the Buddhist teacher license. You know, you know you if you say it the right way of course it's the right timing and a lot of respect and love and care. But you can say things like that, because even and the reason I'm telling you this now is that even something like you know, the dramatic grief of the loss of a spouse is not necessarily always just a pure natural, you know, grief and loss, it itself can it be in be entangled with compulsions with clinging so that we have, and sometimes those attachments and clinging have to do with self identity issues that we that we have. And so the freedom of Buddhism is very, very profound issue or possibility that we all have. And so the faith, Buddhism is really a faith in the possibility of freedom. And, and this is something that human beings can do. That's a worthwhile goal. And it's a

worthwhile goal to kind of somehow be oriented around in your life. The second the A your faith is authenticity, honesty being truthful. That part of the function of faith and Buddhism is to inspire us to move us towards greater and greater authenticity. And so this has a lot to do with mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is a practice of being honest. And I think it's synonymous Usually, we sit down and meditation we do sit down and close our eyes. And we try to be really honest about what our experience is right here. Now, many times it's relatively mundane, use being truthfully present for your breath through in breath and out breath. But there can also be, you know, it's very hard sometimes to have really honest with oneself. And so to slowly slowly discover how to be authentic. And I think that doesn't mean that you have to be a saint. It means that you're completely honest about that. Being a devil. It doesn't it doesn't mean that you act on being a devil. But you're not you don't kind of try to be pretty and pretend you're something you're not. But you try to be do your best you can to live a good life by being authentic.

So so a little story from from recently, I was at a I was eating with some friends, and it was time for me to go and go stood up to leave. And one of the people there had some business to take care of with me. And I said, you know, I'm feeling uncharacteristically impatient. And which was true, I was just saying what I was feeling, wasn't saying I was leaving right thing, but I just wanted them to at least know that I wasn't feeling impatient in case they picked it up and felt that you know that that was come out. I just wanted to know. And I was hoping to leave it let me let me go. But as it was, I had to sit down and listen, take take care of the bit take care of the business anyway. So that was the end of the story for me. But later A few days later, someone who's at the table said, Ted, how inspired they were, that I had been so truthful. Because maybe normally you don't tell people I'm impatient. But you know, so this idea of being authentic and I did it in a way I wasn't being critical of anyone or just, you know, wasn't and I wasn't trying to make myself in. I wasn't trying to be I didn't feel proud of being impatient. It just happens to be how I was. You know, I didn't feel like embarrassed by being impatient. I'm just impatient. So I was gonna tell them and then we all take it into account, where I was thought they would take it better into account.

So anyway to be authentic as part of faith, and hope that that's not something you feel like you can argue against. But a very important part of this faith in Buddhism and called Mindfulness enterprises, to be authentic and discover how to do that in a way that's helpful for you and helpful to others around you. Then the eye is intention. That part of having faith is to have an intention. And intention is a very important part of being human being. A lot follows in the wake of our intention. In fact, there's a saying in Buddhism, that everything depends on the here they say, from the tip of our intention that the growing point over intention is heading that so much follows the result of that. When I was doing Zen practice in San Francisco Zen Center, I was told that one of the prime aspects of Zen practice was the purification of our intention, that if the intention was pure, everything else would take care of itself would follow it in time, things would unfold. But the idea is there has to be some intention has to be some choice to choose something different than being erotic. Otherwise, there's no hope, right? Or choose something different than business as usual. Because if you're suffering, and you say, Well, I'm just gonna accept my life as it is. You meet him and you accept all your suffering. Now, Buddhism is about freedom from suffering. And so naive acceptance that it allows you to continue suffering doesn't bring freedom. So there's a choice and intention to change one's life and move in a different direction. It doesn't have to be a dramatic change at first, but there has to be some choice, some intention. And so that's part of the reason There's unusually a lot of people here, first Monday of the new year. I imagine that you know, it's it's well known that a friend of mine used to run a gym on the on the gym. And he said that, you know, he really dependent on your whole business depended on all these people who signed up in January. So here we are, you know, and we're over spilling out to the other room. We'll see, you know, in six months. The, you know, so the New Year people set their intention and sort of set



an intention. And then part of the function of faith is certainly to make a choice, but then they have fuel and energy behind that choice. So we stick to it to engage in it. So we keep going in it, but there has to be a choice. And so what's that choice that you make with faith with confidence with trust? And so the choice to be free, perhaps our choice to try to be free is choice to practice a practice that leads to freedom. So, then there is pay so let me get a tea right. And the tea there's trust. So that's one of the synonyms for the word sada. The Pali word for faith is trust. And I love the word trust of myself because it's been a very important part of my own Buddhist practice is a deep trust in Well, someone asked me many of them a number of times people have asked me what do you trust in and what do you have faith in? And for a long time, I thought it was a strange question. The in part, I just had trust. You have to trust in something Just I didn't feel a need to fill in, in some things, just just trust. What does that mean? That trust it means not exactly acceptance, because that can have its problems. But you know, for me, it meant that the strongest thing I faith in or trust in is that if I'm mindful, if I'm completely honest and mindful and present, then this moment here, as it unfolds, is trustable. And that's a quite a powerful thing to have faith and trust in that if I'm mindful of this moment, but mindful here now, then I can trust the unfolding of things. Now, you I'm sure you can think of reservations about that. If I stand there in the middle of highway 101. And just really, you're mindfully present

is that Enough, everything will unfold beautifully as I get splattered on the pavement. You know, of course, you know, we take care of ourselves and avoid traffic, you know, standing in the way of trucks and stuff and at barreling down the freeway. But we can't avoid all the trucks heading our way. Right? Sooner or later some trucks gonna get you the metaphorical truck. And things happen in our life. And before we can we can protect ourselves from it is we can protect ourselves from the way that our mind add suffering to that event, how we get afraid, how we resist the inevitable, how we get angry, how we get lost in the fantasy and imagination of the future, how we create all these cities. Oreos in our mind, how we, you know, there's so many things that we do that in Buddhism, the shorthand for is clinging. And there's when we cling, we create suffering for ourselves when we're mindful mindfulness is the protection from us clinging. So hopefully we'll know what to do, you know, out in the street. But when when I when I'm mindful, I am protected and unprotected for myself. And I don't know how about yours how you are. But this is really good news for me. Sometimes I've wondered, sometimes a bit I've been a little bit frightened by the image, the imagination of what I would have been like if I hadn't We discovered Buddhist practice. I don't think it would have been a pretty picture.

Anyway, so this is a level of trust and trusting the practice trusting myself trusting the teachings, trusting a process of unfolding and deepening and, and moving through us. And I think that trust part is very important because one of the neurosis is people have is it is to take too much responsibility. One of the ways to take too much responsibility is the conceit. That I'm not good enough. I can't do this. Or one of the is there the conceit Look how great I am. I'm the one who's doing it. Who needs trust. I'll just barrel through this. But I think that to trust something, something that is not your willful efforts. Not your egotistical efforts I found max Faraday was came up with some of the laws of thermodynamics was asked where he came up with his laws how to discover his laws and he said something inside of me which is not myself and that's a beautiful so I like that because you know I'm more comfortable with that and saying you know something external. But trust me trust to this idea of trust I think is beautiful. And then the last ah it's interesting the word for it Ah, because it ties back to apparently, apparently, back the word sraddha in Sanskrit goes back to ancient ancient Indian Vedic literature, the Rigveda since all this literature of India, and apparently scholars say that the original meaning or the root of Word sraddha meant hospitality. And it had to do kind of with hospitality you had towards the gods. You know, so you would create this ritual space and you would invite the gods and feed them. I don't know what they did. I'm not so sure what it was involved, but but hospitality. And I think that's beautiful. So the age of faith is to be hospitable. And to be hospitable to the hospital, it means to you, you offer

something. It's not only about you getting, it's not only about you trusting and allowing something to happen. It's not only about you setting intention, on not only you focusing on faith and freedom for yourself, but there's also something we offer when that we're living not just this life for ourselves, but we're being hospitable to our experience for one that we don't accept our experience so much. But when we create a hospital environment, in our mind, we're not in conflict with our experience, the idea of being a host i think is a nice one, maybe at my host for my pain, from my suffering, as opposed to be to fight it. But then also the idea of hospitality to me in my mind also implies the idea that we also live to be good hosts to to the world around us. If the world is our home, we're the host, as much as the guest. And so to be hospitable to be someone who has offers hospitality to our fellow human beings to fellow world where we are willing to be someone to live a life in such a way that people can have faith in us. Have confidence in us have trust in us that we're a trustable person, that we're a safe person that we're someone that can be they can people can go to for help. So here you know at IMC we come here hopefully This environment here is hospitable enough that you feel like you can practice here. But you're coming here, you're also being a host. You're not only here, just the fact that you're here, you're creating and supporting other people to practice. And so part of faith is to open up your, your life, your heart, so that you're also living for the benefit of others. That's what the host part implies. So faith, freedom, Authenticity, intention, trust, and hospitality. So I hope that as you embark on this year 2011 that freedom and authenticity and intention and trust and hospitality is something that grows in you into a beautiful, blossoming plant. Thank you.