

2012-01-30 The Five Faculties

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SPEAKERS

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So last week I gave a talk on the five hindrances. And the five hindrances are a list of five mental forces psychological forces that interfere with the process of meditation. And they could be set to interfere with all kinds of endeavors in our life. And many times if you want to do something, you can easily be derailed by the forces of desire. Sometimes the forces of ill will or version forces of restlessness, of sloth torpor, resistance, and doubt. Today, I want to talk about a different list of five, which are a list of five psychological forces that support meditation practice, and in fact, they support any endeavor I think that we want to engage in. So it applies to other things besides meditation. And this is the list called the five faculties and in calling them faculties, it refers to capacities that our inner life our mind has, that we can utilize. Or we can Marshal together in such a way to support whatever endeavor we're engaged in. And so if we're engaged in meditation practice, the question is how do these five faculties their five capacities are? They're there in the background anyway? How do we utilize these capacities of ours in such a way that supports the endeavor that practice of meditation. So these five faculties, the list is, and the list is often given sequentially, meaning that there's a way of understanding them that they build on each other to the final one. So the first one is usually translated to English as faith. The second is effort. The third is mindfulness. The fourth is concentration. And the fifth is wisdom. Occasionally, you see some different translations into English, these things. And as I go through them, you'll hear maybe some synonyms for them. So if you don't like some of those English choices, some people don't like the word faith. And so the alternative that some people like to use is conviction, or confidence. And some people have less challenging is troubled by the word confidence or conviction, because faith suggests sometimes blind faith, the faith. So, in any endeavor that we're engaged in, it helps if we have some confidence and trust, some faith that what we're doing can be done but it's worth it. It's worthwhile to do that we know how to do it enough, and that the results are worthwhile and that faith that we can do it You can add, maybe add that we are sometimes faith that we have the guides, the friends, support the teachers around who can guide us as we do it. And that without some kind of confidence, there's many things we've done in our life that we wouldn't accomplish. And we wouldn't even start them. And many times we don't consider don't think that faith confidence conviction is part of what we do because it just so second nature when we're so successful doing it, we don't think about it. But if you're going to cook a meal, these there has to be some confidence, some conviction, some faith, that it's worthwhile to do that you can do it that, that you have the ingredients you have the ability that the outcome has a good chance of being successful. And if you have no faith that you can do it. Maybe with cooking is not the best example but certain things you do if you have no faith, no confidence, it can derail hear from what you want to do. My 14 year old son at home is on his school's basketball team. And his confidence goes up and down and affects his game. And so I told him the other day that he mentioned this to me, and he said, You know, he just kind of talked myself into, you know, being more, you know, confident. And I said, Well, sometimes you can do that. But I said, if you can't do it, at least stop being critical of yourself, stop doubting yourself. And that he seemed to like the idea that he

stopped something that was more accessible to him the idea that he could actually muster up some kind of change of mind that he was a good player when he was missing all the shots. But in any case, in whatever we're doing has to be some confidence.

So in terms of meditation practice, what are some of the things that we can have confidence in or have faith in or what is it that can help us so we can be heartfelt or give our give ourselves over in a wholehearted way to the endeavor of meditation practice. And this is important question because many people find it hard to meditate. They have busy lives, a lot of other things pulling and pulling and tugging on them, if they want to meditate, or if they do meditate, there's still a lot of forces in life that are pulling and tugging us. So maybe you're not really meditating. You're sitting there, and then you're planning your meal or planning your basketball games or, you know, whatever that your mind kind of caught up in. And so it helps to so part of what I like why I like the word faith to translate this word, the proper the ancient Indian word, saddhā is that, in my mind, Faith has heartfelt quality to it. That conviction doesn't, or confidence maybe has some of but what is it that inspires Is there inspiration? Is there some kind of faith or trust that inspires you in what you're going to do? So, for me, when I was a young meditator, I was very inspired by some of the other meditation students that I met. I was around them and I was there was a stillness in them, or there was a maturity in them, or there was some wisdom in them, or there was a peacefulness with them or generosity. Very different people had different qualities that I that I very much associated with their meditation practice. And in particular, when I sat together with other people in meditation hall, and I could see how some people sat. There was a stillness and they're sitting, and I kind of you can kind of kind of feel kind of a focus to what they were doing. That was Very, very meaningful for me to encounter and feel that someone could be so poised, so collected, so centered in a beautiful and steal away. And I remember like being in Japan, some of the images that I was in that really that also kind of inspired me in this way was in the chapter, a Japanese Zen monastery, sometimes we had to meditate optionally kind of required way optionally required. Everyone had to do it to no choice, but it was optional. In the schedule, that's what it said. But way into the middle of the night was full moon. And, and we had to do it, not in the meditation hall, but we had to do it on the NGO on the outside walkway around the meditation or on the temple. And you know, it's kind of cold November I remember one time, and the Siberian winds were blowing in from the North Sea or whatever is called Japanese sea. But it was so pristinely beautiful because we're sitting on the edge of this walkway wouldn't walkways you know, and looking out across the Japanese rock garden, this was the monastery and with the moon coming up and the walls of the monastery around us and that was you know, it's pretty in the full moon shining down and 11 o'clock midnight and then see how seeing the other monks all in a row and seeing their their poise and centeredness and their strength. In just sitting there still was very meaningful for me. So there's many ways in which other people inspired me gave me faith that this was worthwhile to do and then There was also i'd received some by faith for beginners and maybe this doesn't work. But from seeing what the results have been for me that seeing that by the simple by the practice is beneficial that it has results that as I meditate, I get more settled and calmer I get more wise I get more insight and see more deeply what's going on that some of those qualities that I saw and others I could touch into in myself, and that at times I could feel a poise a centeredness a calm a stability, some inner strength, inner joy that would arise in me.

It doesn't always occur happened for me as I meditate, but I've done this enough that it's okay if it doesn't happen on a sitting because I have enough confidence in the overall process over time. And if it sometimes it doesn't happen, that's okay with me. But other times it happens in a very strong way. And it isn't that that you know, just a very pleasant experience to be calm and centered. But there's something very for me very deeply satisfying, about a process of becoming true. And I associate meditation practice or mindfulness meditation, with a process of becoming true to oneself and becoming true to what's to life or to the Dharma, or to being authentic, or discovering really what's here

in me and letting it be expressed in some important way. And this idea of becoming true, even if I don't succeed becoming true, in some some kind of quality way. I just find it so meaningful, that there's a on a path of practice that leads to or attempts to bring me to becoming true, it's becoming authentic. And so that brings me a lot of faith inspiration, wow, I'm so lucky, I get to do this. And so when I sit down to meditate, I usually feel quite happy. Even if I'm not feeling Feeling good, otherwise grumpy? Not enough sleep. I said, Well, I get it, I get to do this, I get to try this. And, and, and that's very important for me because just the endeavor of doing it I have faith in separate from any success in doing it. So I just I'm so glad even if I don't succeed in some conventional way, I'm just so glad I get to try. I got to try to be true. I got to try to be authentic to wake up to be free. I have a lot of confidence in the path of the practice, that I have a lot of confidence that it's possible to become free. It's possible not to be caught in our attachments caught and things we cling, caught by fear caught in our preoccupations. And that I've seen how the path of meditation practice meditation practice is a very effective way of helping that process of becoming free. I've also seen how meditation passes is a very effective way of create physical and mental well being, you know, wave, not only kind of dissolving stress, but I firmly believe that meditation practice is very healing. And I kind of had this belief for long before I started reading the newspaper reports where they report on these different studies. It seems like every few months is a new study that comes out that says meditation is good for your health. When I was a, you know, 35 years ago, they were people weren't really doing medical studies on meditation. So you know, I didn't know the studies but it just felt you feel from the inside out. A sense of healing, sometimes just sitting poised and centered.

So this idea of what do you have it you have some confidence you have some convictions, some sense of Value something you trust about the process of meditation? Do you have some faith about its value for you? Do you have some confidence in your ability to engage? And I offer that those two as questions. Not that they're supposed to be the right answer. Yes, of course I do. Faith or confidence or conviction trust goes up and down. It's not like a constant. Now I got it. You know, I got it made. But rather as you meditate as you engage in practice, or try to engage in your busy life, it's useful from time to time to reflect, I have a capacity to have to be inspired. I have capacity to have faith and trust conviction. I have the capacity to be a wholehearted in what I do. Do I have those qualities in relationship to meditation practice to my meditation practice? And then you look at that third question. You say, I don't have that today. That's not what going on for me. And then you say, That's interesting. What do I do now with seeing that? Maybe I'll meditate anyway? Because I have some faith, or have some disciplines useful. Or maybe I need to kind of figure out what happened to my confidence in faith. Have I just simply lost touch with it? Because I've been so busy running around doing different things. I'm so caught up in something, or is there some way that I can remind myself of what I'm inspired by? So that when I come sit and meditate, I come with a little bit sense of more of meaning a value of engagement. So it's possible to go and reflect on this and not necessarily take the level of faith or confidence that you have, but try to see is, you know, forcing yourself into some idea of what the faithful person looks like. Is there some way of reflecting or thinking of doing a little Dharma reading of reading Thinking about what it's meant for you in the past or what it might mean for you now, or some way of stepping back from the hole how you are to, to evoke or tap into a sense of inspiration of faith, of confidence when it's lacking. So that's one way of kind of sprucing up your meditation practice. It's also possible they say you can if you check out this Faculty of faith, probably it's harder to discern this, but it's possible to have too much to have blind faith that over kind of be overly zealous to lends itself to kind of a magical thinking, where I have so much faith in this meditation, meditation, just the best and the greatest, and it's just like it'll solve all my problems and all the world's problems and if I just kind of, you know, sit there like a Buddha I haven't made and And then, and then you sit there like, I don't know. Just like a log on the edge of the just you know, you don't, you know, just you sit there as an inert object. Because you have so much faith, there's no more effort to do anything, no wisdom, no

intelligence being used in the practice. So it's possible to have too much. So the second faculty is a faculty of effort of engagement. And it's obvious that we all have that capacity because we engage and put effort in all kinds of different things. If you have, you know, you we make effort to cook a meal. We make an effort to drive our car to come here. All of you have made efforts, some kind of effort, put energy and effort to come here. We're making effort all the time, and sometimes our effort is counterproductive. I've had I've made effort Put my mental and physical effort into sometimes being self critical, or just being discouraged. And there have been a few times in my life where I've been very good at this. Very good, I put it pouring in a lot of energy into, you know, pouring it in pouring it in until, you know, as if it was really important, the most important thing to do was to put my precious little brainpower to use to explain to myself, why

I'm discouraged or why I'm a failure, why, whatever. And so you're making effort, there's energy and going into that kind of, so it's undermining our ourselves. So the question here is this Faculty of effort of energy, or how is it being used? what's what's happening with it when we sit down to meditate? Are we engaged in an effort? That is what the purpose of meditation is about? Are we engaged in an effort that is helpful and useful. So one of the obvious things is that you're not meditating, but you're thinking about something completely different. And so that's where your effort goes, as the energy goes, I find it for myself helpful to occasionally reflect on that having effort and energy is a really precious thing. We have a relatively short time to be alive. This is our time. I love looking and thinking about people who live long ago. Because, and that kind of kind of does that kind of thing in my brain, where I kind of reflect that was their time. And they had their time. And now it's gone for them. And now this is my time. And a few years it'll be gone. It'll be someone else's time. This is my time, to be conscious to be awake, to be present, to make effort to be engaged and what do I I want to do with this precious time, precious efforts that I have. Do I want to do I want in meditation, for example, spend my effort and energy, pursuing fantasies. I want to spend my time pursuing revenge. They want to spend my time planning meals are planning my schedule. What do I want to do with this effort? For me, when I reflect that way, sometimes it helps me kind of say, Wait, this is not what I want to do. I don't want to think about all those things. I want to try to meditate I'm gonna try to corral myself, gather myself together, and have my mental effort and energy be directed to being awake to this precious life of being alive and present now, in this moment, in the lived present. So for me, that kind of reflection sometimes will help me be more here and present. And then as we make effort, there's all kinds of efforts to be made. And so that Usually interesting topic in meditation practice in any spiritual practice at all, is the topic of the quality of the effort we make. And the quality and the character of effort changes in different times in different situations. And it's useful to track it. Sometimes effort needs to be very strong and disciplined. If you know if you have sometimes those powerful addictive forces in people's minds, that are, you better not give into because the consequences is really dire. And sometimes having real discipline for meditation or discipline the mind did not give in to those not go in that direction in the mind, takes a lot of effort. Other times, making a lot of strong effort just keeps the mind agitated and helps you to spin out even more. And so the effort is not strong and disciplined, but the effort needs to be more relax, soften the effort. Maybe make less effort. do less, it'd be doing too much in meditation. So the teachings on effort then is Relax, relax often don't take so much responsibility. Sometimes what effort means is persistence. So it means that that means I mean just hang in there and keep doing it keep making the effort over time. Don't let anything discourage you. image that I like is the image of a boat moving through the water and you keep the focus on the bow of the boat and the bow just plows through the water and the water just washes off the side of the hall the boat and you know, it washes off and disappears in the back of the boat moves through the water. So that image for me in meditation, sometimes I just keep my attention. best I can, on my breath are in the present moment and try to keep it there. As if it's the Keeping the bow of the boat both pointed in the direction and let all the things that might arise. Imagine just washing off the side. And so I might think about, you know, making dinner or

planning something or am I thinking about remember something early in the day or I might have some emotion comes up. And rather than getting involved in those, I just let them kind of just kind of Wash, wash by wash buys, I keep my focus, keep my focus.

And then I started, keep that keep the persistence of staying being present, coming back, coming back, keeping it up. So that over time, the forces of distraction the forces of preoccupation begin to relax. And sometimes it takes just keeping in there staying there, keeping the course keeping the course in practice. So what's the quality of your efforts is part of the consideration when we evaluate our practices, the third faculty capacity that we all have is a capacity for Mindfulness, to be mindful to be attentive to notice what's going on. And so this is considered kind of like a, the other five faculties, the one that maintains the oversight over the others. Because Because the ones that it's the one that recognizes the others notice is what the faith is if there's a faith or confidence, notice as the effort, notices, concentration notices, what's the quality of the wisdom, the function of mindfulness is not only to keep us in the present moment, but be in the present moment to clearly recognize and monitor what's happening here in the present moment. If you recognize if you hear and can really be present and see what's happening here, then we can monitor it, we can adjust it and do things for it. So you sit down to meditate. And you're not if you've noticed, and I'm not really tracking what's going on. You know, it could be as simple as you feel like you have after 20 minutes of meditation you feel an aching Your back. And only then do you realize that you haven't had much mindfulness of your body. As you're meditating. And you've actually been sitting, your posture has been quite poor and slumping, so of course, your back is going to hurt. And so, you know, maybe you need to be more attentive for your body be more mindful here. The it might be helpful to notice the quality of your emotional state Be mindful of that in the present moment. Because without being mindful of your emotional state, the emotions can cast a big shadow or big influence on on how we are in the present moment, our relationship to what's happening. But if we notice carefully what our emotions are, then they don't have to be kind of, kind of subconsciously be influences influence us. So for example, if we feel grumpy, or our versiv, kind of irritated, irritable, and you sit down to meditate, if you don't really recognize the heritability, that's here. Then you might find yourself kind of kind of regularly, constantly going a little bit, you know, irritated with that breath and that in breath and out breath and, and the fact that your mind wandered off and everything's kind of like this cast is a kind of immersive quality to it. And it kind of feels like a drag. But if you're mindful of what's going on and you're open up to experience the field of your of what's happening, then you see I'm, I'm in the irritate irritable today. Let me take that into account as I meditate so that when I'm focusing on something, maybe I can let those thoughts so they are versiv tendencies kind of fall to the background, not take them so seriously. Not Have them kind of kind of unduly influenced me. So it's possible to see in practice, what's the quality of my mindfulness? Am I really my mindfulness clear or is it Is it kind of cloudy? Is, am I able to be mindful? Or does my mind wander off a lot? What's the quality of mindfulness? And some people do meditation doesn't go? Well, if they find difficulty, because they actually find it, they're not actually being very mindful. I've done that with like, sometimes, by getting somehow caught up with the idea that I'm supposed to get concentrated or wanting to get concentrated. And so I try to be concentrated in such a way that I narrow my focus of attention. that precludes being mindful and tracking what's really going on for me in the present moment. And so I don't notice that I'm actually upset about something or I'm actually striving or pushing or that I'm maybe I'm sometimes that maybe I'm too relaxed. But mindful part of the function of mindfulness is to open the field of awareness to track and notice what's happening here in the present moment. The fourth factor of faculty is concentration. So it is an important aspect of this. And concentration has a number of meanings, the word Samadhi. But I think one of the meanings it's very valuable for me is the idea of gathering together of being collected, being unified, so that I'm not fragmented.

It's very easy to be fragmented to have many different thoughts and concerns and feelings going on almost at the same time. And so the mind is spinning out all kinds of ways. Our wish is to be present in meditation, maybe focusing on the breath. That's the intention. The mind has a mind of its own. So the mind wants to think about what to have for dinner. But there's also the lingering idea the arguments we had earlier in the day, and that's still staying in my body and still churning out thoughts of irritation and whatever. And so part of me is involved with the thoughts of their earlier in the day and the irritation. Part of me is thinking about dinner, part of me is focusing on my hunger. And part of me is trying to meditate. And so there's too much going on. And so we're fragmented part of the function of concentration is not to hold the mind still on one object, but rather is to begin gathering together all the desperate or scattered forces within us, so that they're all settled and focused here for the same purpose at the same time. So that when we sit down to meditate, not only are we intending to be present, but our thoughts our thinking is focused on being present, our emotional life, our physical life begins to be brought in, we draw, it's like drawing everything in. So everything is involved in the same thing. So this idea of being centered, so we're all centered on here, and what's happening now. I like the word center. Because for me, it has this feeling of sitting upright. And being still and finding a place of rest, deep down in my torso, kind of like the base, like the firm foundation, and then letting go and resting in that firm foundation, as the as the place where I am. And I know that when I get scattered, and I have a lot of thoughts and concerns, I'm not resting in myself, I'm not resting in my torso or in my base. I'm often up in my head, kind of, you know, the centrifugal force that's going spinning outwards. And so this idea of concentration being composed centeredness being composed in our experience here. So it's possible as we evaluate our practice to say, what's that? Is there any concentration? Is there any composure Am I centered? Of course the meditations not going well. Maybe Because I'm not composed, I'm not centered. And so is it then possible to, to do some adjustment to remind oneself to find some way of settling, composing, gathering together to be here and now. So then the fifth faculty is wisdom. And this is a member this, these are faculties, which means capacities are functionings of our mind, or in our life. So, here, it's the faculty of wisdom, not the possession of wisdom. And the possession of wisdom would be kind of its kind of like, you have all kinds of knowledge. You know, like you you've you've learned from, you know, a lifetime of poor driving, that it's not a good idea to drive at 90 miles an hour on the freeway. So you've learned that you that you become a watch provides driver and you have this wisdom. Don't drive 90 miles an hour on the freeway. So that's you know, if you possessed with the wisdom, but the faculty of wisdom means that you use your discernment, you use your intelligence to read and measure and discern and figure out what is needed in any situation. So if you're on the freeway, you're you're you're tracking the traffic and the conditions and yourself to say, Well, what would be a safe way of driving in these conditions. You don't go in the freeway with a preconceived idea that this is how you drive. I drive at this speed, you know, and, and invariably, and in this lane, you know, nothing changes. I'm just, you know, on cruise control, but rather, you know, we keep our intelligence and our discernment, and we making constant adjustments and changes. So the same thing with meditation. There's a time and place to use our intelligence and meditation. I know some meditators who check their intelligence at the door. And they don't use it when they meditate. They think they're not supposed to. Maybe they just too much faith. But the idea being that, to some degree, you want to use your powers of discerning discernment to try to understand what is it what's needed right now? What do I need? What would be helpful right now?

Would it be helpful for me to just hold my course on the breath? And let everything else fall off like this side of the hill? Would it be helpful for me not to focus on the breath, but to spend a little bit of time being mindful of my emotional state would be helpful right now? I'm so spinning out in my thoughts, my concerns. Maybe I need to do mindfulness of thinking for a little while and not just kind of blindly stay with a breath. I have so little energy as I'm meditating right now, I keep falling asleep and slumping. Maybe I need to bring more energy into my practice. Maybe I sit up straight Raider and find the different

ways of bringing wire for an energy into it. Right now I'm not very inspired. There's not much faith. I don't really believe in this meditation stuff. It's boring. And now Gil's talking about it for like 45 minutes, but all this stuff you can do and track and it just, it's so daunting and seems like so difficult and so much to keep track of. And now I'm completely lost my inspiration. And so, and so you recognize that and say so. Okay, well, I want to let me find from Mike Let's forget about Gil said, Let me find what inspires me or what gives me confidence. And because that's what I need, if I'm going to kind of settle in here and do it. So discernment has to do with tracking how it is and seeing what needs to adjust and what needs to be changed. One of the very important qualities of this discernment or this Faculty of wisdom is to try it for it to track itself because it's easy for some people for the in desert. into consideration the reflection what's needed right now, to end up being a lot of agitated thinking. Just thinking and thinking and wondering about what's going on, and not really settling. And part of the function of mindfulness is to notice, oh, the way I'm thinking about the way I'm trying to understand or discern or adjust my practice, just keeping me spinning my wheels, or it's making me tense or it's making me agitated. I think I better use less of this discernment for a while. I'm better relax. And part of the function of your lack of concentration is to relax concentration is meant to be something that's softening and relaxing. So then some people find it helpful to go back, go back and be concentrated and let's just look back and be mindful without trying to do anything else but be mindful and make any adjustments. or other times you want to see I need an adjustment here. I need to change what I focus my attention on or maybe I need to be much more disciplined. And you really kind of commit myself I need more commitment. And so I need to be committed to the breath. And sometimes there are times when a strong commitment what's what's needed to override the strong forces of distraction or preoccupation we have. So I offer these five faculties as a ways that you can evaluate your own practice and meditation practice. If you find it, find it difficult to meditate, because for whatever reason, you can't seem to get to the, to the to their meditation during the course of your day. And you keep trying, but you just can't do it. It might be interesting to step back and just kind of consider maybe journal or talk with a friend and go through how is it with these five faculties for you? How do they operate for you in relationship to meditation? How do they operate in relationship to your life? Is there some way that you can use so some of these five faculties as a way to help support you to get more involved in meditation. So for example, I don't know if this is a good example I apologize ahead of time. But I know people for whom being over this more discerning, but how they use their time could help them find a time to meditate. So there are people who tell me, you know, I don't have any time I'm very busy, and I do a lot of different things. And you know, it's very important things and how do I find time for meditation? And then I'll ask them, How much time do you spend watching television and usually, they get kind of a little bit shy and because it's very quickly, they realize that mean that you know what some of the things they watch on television don't have that much value. And that the way it maybe it helps you unwind, maybe it's not as high quality unwinding can happen when you meditate. Some people are addicted to you know TV. So discernment will tell you to be more discerning would be, you know, I need to maybe make an adjustment in my life and drop something. And maybe that's what I can drop is watching so much television or, you know, doing so much computer time or playing solitaire on my iPad, whatever it might be.

Or perhaps you find that energy is the issue, you don't have enough energy and you find yourself lagging and energy over and over and over again. And perhaps you need to consider in a more global scale. Why is it you're always dragging? Why is the sum total energy that you have? What's going on for you? Is there some adjustments you can make in your life? So if you have trouble getting to meditation, maybe there's a way of looking at these five faculties that might be supportive of you if what you want to do is meditate regularly. If you do regularly meditate regularly, from time to time, you might step back Either in meditation, in a sense, or outside of meditation, and reflect a little bit, how do these five faculties operate for me when I meditate? What is my faith? What is my, my effort like? I've been in, I've been embarrassed or notice sometimes after the end of the meditation, but I've sat to rely only then

realize, Oh, boy, I hardly made any effort at all. My effort was like, really not there. Because I had important things to, you know, think about. Or, you know, I wasn't really that motivated, and I was just drifting off in fantasy pork and fantasies. And I wasn't really making effort and I could have easily have just, you know, made a tune my efforts and made a little more effort. So in meditation for your meditation when you're tracking it, and occasionally it's good to evaluate. And these five faculties are way to evaluate and perhaps by doing that, you can maybe make some adjustments and find that it supports your meditation practice so that your own inner experience could be that is something that inspires you and gives you faith or conviction that's sitting, being centered, being still being calm, being collected. being strong, being centered, is beautiful and a spot and a valuable thing to do with your time. So, I wish you well with that, I hope it was, gave you something to think about explore and thank you