

2016-01-24 The Five Faculties As Supports To Opening Up

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SPEAKERS

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wanted to talk today about one of the nuts and bolts teachings around meditation and mindfulness, which is something called the four faculties, the four capacities that we have, that are considered to be very important to monitor to understand. in ourselves, as we negotiate the world with mindfulness and meditation, as we begin to understanding some of the structures of the mind some of the factors, faculties facilities of the mind, then we can use them to our favor. If we don't understand our mind, then the mind just does what it does. And we don't have any control over it. And in fact, the word for in Pali for that's often translated as faculties, is indriya. And the word indriya, comes from the name of the Indian God, Indra, who, back in the old days, at least, was the, the, the ruler of all the gods, the one who controlled lots of things. And so the Buddhist had adopted this word, for those faculties that we have, that can have some semblance of control over our mental landscape, we don't have to be just the victims of things just as they are, we have some some ability to engage and monitor and track and, and adjust what's going on. These five faculties these five, sometimes some people have tried translated into English as a five controlling faculties.

The problem with that is that, I think in California Buddhism, the word control is kind of not really allowed. You're not supposed to control things in it, you know, in California, Buddhism is more about accepting. But in fact, both are very important. And we have to actually learn is what we can control. And what we have some ability to, you know, to have some mastery over and what we don't have control over and just let it be the and the specialty of Buddhism has to do with tracking your own mind, your mental landscape, and knowing what you can do to make a difference there, what you can support, what you can develop and grow, for your, for your betterment. And these five faculties are things that can be developed, not just the faculties you have, but the muscles, the mental muscles that can be developed. And then they become a different list, because Buddhism loves lists. And then the same things no longer become the five faculties, they become the five powers. So these five, are depends how we translate them. And you know, you have to take the translations in English a little bit lightly, because most commonly, the first one is translated as faith, the second one as energy, the third mindfulness, then concentration, and then wisdom. And these are all capacities we have. And the word faith is a little bit frightening to people. But if you think of it as confidence instead of faith, then maybe it could seem more, you know, personal. And these five are active all the time. It isn't like this, you know, a foreign esoteric idea that you have to import into your mind, but rather, in almost any activity that you're doing, maybe all those five are operating to some degree. So you know, if you are going to bake bread, you probably have to have some faith or confidence that you can do it, or that you have the ingredients to do it or you have the recipe to do it. But there's some some some you know, if you've never done it before, never done a particular recipe, some faith, some confidence. And then you don't

just sit looking at your recipe book. And then suddenly, the bread appears. You have to insert some kind of energy and effort into it. And then you should pay attention to what you're doing. Because you know, you just pour flour in. And you know, you could make a mess of it, then it could all come out all wrong when proportions are all wrong and you don't mix it well. And so you have to have some attention to what you're doing. You know, it could be tempting to watch the internet while you're making the bread right? Do something else but if you bring your attention to it, and then it's Helps certain time periods of making bread, that you give it your full focus, certain kind of stable focused attention. Maybe when you're needing the dough, it's best to kind of really stay focused and stay there, because you're needing on the edge of the table. And if you don't really stay focused, it'll roll right off on the floor or something. But you really must stay there and feel it and be present for it. And really sense that you're working out the lumps that you're kind of really turning the bread properly. And so you need some kind of focused attention as well. And then the last is wisdom, you have to have some capacity for discernment for making distinction, seeing clearly what's going on. So for example, with making bread, and your, you need to make sure that it's the right proportion of flour and water, for example. And so you might not have it quite right. And so you're needing the bread and you feel so it's just too wet. And so you, you put in more flour, or it's too dry, and you sprinkle a little bit more water. And slowly, you get just the right consistency. And you have though, and then you'll leave it alone, and then something can grow and develop. So, you know, without those five faculties, we probably wouldn't be successful in making bread or riding a bicycle or driving a car, all kinds of activities. And it's possible to look at different activities, and see which of the five faculties might be strong, which might be weak. It might be that your confidence or faith in what you're doing is weak.

And so there's you're not really into it, you don't hold back perhaps or you feel discouraged, or you undermine yourself. It could be that be there's not much wisdom operating, which means you're not really paying attention to learn what's going on, be discerning and evaluating and kind of just kind of tracking what's going on and trying to figure out what is the wise way to go forward here, what's the right way to take care of the situation. It's possible the mindfulness is a week, and so that, you know, you're not really paying attention carefully, and you keep messing up what you're doing, it's possible that you're not really asserting the right kind of effort, too much too little. Or it's possible that the activity you need, needs a lot of really one pointed attention, and you have to really be there fully for the activity. And otherwise things kind of don't work so well. You're having a very important conversation with your partner, maybe. And it seems like this, you know, your partner's distressed upset about something you really need to be there. And, you know, and you know, so you're pretty mindful of your device, as you're checking emails, and you know, and then you want to go check, you know, and see if you got it, you know, what's the latest, you know, show and all kinds of things, right, but you're not really offering your partner your one point of attention, and this, which, which really needed there. So the five faculties are operating in meditation as well. And in doing mindfulness, and it's possible to track oneself and notice, how are these five operating? Are they strong? Are they weak? Are they imbalanced with each other, and as we understand them, then we can kind of call upon them, evoke them, and use them for our betterment for you know, I find it very interesting that they're calling the controlling factor, sometimes faculties. And because of this issue of what we can control and what we can't control. couple of times in my time being a teacher, I have advised people who are going into surgery. And one of them I advise that be because you're stuck, aware, conscious, that in laying there in her, you know, in the bed waiting to have surgery, that suggests that she practice metta meditation, loving kindness meditation. And the other one, I suggested that she practice breath meditation, just be with her breathing. And both of them after the surgery, came back with the same kind of comment. And they said they'd had surgery before. So they're familiar with having surgery. And they said this time, in the past, they always felt like they had given up control, that they had no role, they just passive kind of victims to the surgical nice knife, whatever the doctors did. And they were kind of just kind of, you know, helpless, kind of, to do anything for themselves. And when they had the meditation practice to do, they felt that

they were in control. They not have the surgery, but they felt like they had some role to play. They were involved. They were engaged, they take some responsibility, and it made a world of difference between just being kind of, they wouldn't say the word victim but just being the victim of circumstance versus being engaged and having some charge. And the most important things we can take charge over is the quality The overall mind are responsivity how we respond, how we react, what we what we're thinking, what we're believing what we do with our attention. If we give our attention to our sense of being a victim laying there, on this on in the hospital bed, waiting for surgery, then that's what gets fed and developed. But if we don't feed or give attention to those kinds of thoughts, and give attention to other kinds of thoughts like metta meditation, wishing loving kindness on their surgeon, it I don't know how well you know, that travels beyond you into the surgeon, but I'm sure that has a better effect than I think just thinking you're a victim. And anyway, so it's feel feel like you have some some building control. In the suttas of the Buddha, there's a, I think, a wonderful Corey story. I think it's a general Army soldier or something, but come and talk to the Buddha. And somehow in the course of the conversation, the Buddha does this teaches this analogy and simile or something. If the mountain range in the in the West, starts moving towards you, and the ones in the East start moving towards you, and the north and the south start moving towards you. And theirs is coming as nothing's going to stop them. It's kind of like the trash compactor in Star Wars. If so, you know, it's coming and coming. And there's no nothing's going to stop it. What do you do? What? Jump Where? Where do you jump jump up? Two feet, if you're lucky speaking mouth and say coming? And? And so the answer is that you practice the Dharma.

So meaning that at that time, I think the idea is it's hopeless, there's nothing you can do about stopping the mountains coming, so they're gonna get you. So you might as well, you have something you have control over. And that is the quality the state of your own mind. And that's a precious thing to do. Now, it's kind of a dramatic story, maybe doesn't really resonate much with you. But I've known a number of people who have made remarkable transformations. Once that they knew they were dying, then there was this was that the mountains were coming. And they were clearly dying. And they went maybe only had a few days to live or a few weeks. And there was a remarkable transformation of peace, of openness, of goodness of love, just kind of fully being there in a kind of way that was radiant and beautiful. So you know, sometimes it's the, you know, the people, some people I've known who have a strong practice, that practice has come into the forefront during that time, because what else are you going to do? For some people, and so you know, when there's nothing else you can do sometimes, you can at least take care of your heart and your mind, and, and maybe a transformative and change it. And so what do we have control over? And what do we not have control over. And the idea of Buddhism is to begin, attaining some degree of appropriate mastery over your own mind. So you're not just a victim of the thoughts and impulses and feelings that go there. So that you are not hooked by them, crushed by them, you know, a mountain has come from the west, east, north and south, your thoughts come not only from all those directions, they come from above and below, they just like and from the middle. They're gonna crush you if you're not careful. And so to track and see what's going on. So in terms of mindfulness and meditation, the first faculty is faith, confidence, trust, whatever word you like the most. The I actually actually like quite a bit the word confidence, because it doesn't have necessarily obviously kind of a religious kind of connotations that some people have trouble with. However, the word faith I like also, because it's a warm or more heartfelt feeling. confidence to me, in my mind is a little bit more Matter of fact, more like you know, it's more operational confidence in doing something. Whereas having faith in something My heart is in it feels like you know, it's wholehearted and the wholeheartedness comes from me with a sense of faith warmed anyways for me. For a long time, I love the word trust. And I felt that was one of the primary things I learned from doing mindfulness practice, Buddhist practice was a profound degree of trust. I learned that if I was mindful, I could trust anything that arises and you're not any mountains that comes my way. I can't trust the mountains, but I can trust, I can trust their situate situation, that if I was mindful in the middle of it, amazing gift that this practices

done, the so to have faith, or confidence in the value of monitoring your own mind, paying attention to your heart, paying attention, what's going on here, to really that it's valuable, to really know yourself well, to know what you believe, to know what you want, what you don't want, what you're afraid of, to know the impulses, the reactions, to really know it inside and out, to be able to see it coming with your inner inner life. So that you can have some choice over what you pick up what you get involved in, and what you say, No, thank you, I don't need that. Or some choice to change the direction of your mind, I change the direction of my thoughts streams regularly. If I am, you know, sometimes I'm driving around or walking down here or different times. And I noticed what I'm thinking about. And I say, you know, I this is interesting, it's nice. But I don't think I particularly want to think about this right now, I have more interesting things to think about. So you know, if you're coming down here, Sunday mornings, like walking down there takes about half an hour for me to walk here. And notice what I'm thinking about and say, you know, Gil, you're about to give a talk, I think you should think about the talk you could give these people probably would like you to think if you thought about the talk a little bit.

And so I changed the direction of my mind. There are other circumstances in my life, where I don't change the direction of my thoughts, I just let that completely be, I find it fascinating and very important to have certain times of the day, where I just give free rein for my thoughts just to do what they do. Occasionally I do with meditation, but it's not really that's not the best place for me for that. The most interesting place for me is when I exercise, an exercise, I just give complete free, anything goes in my mind, I just let it to free reign. And what happens then and that you know, I'm safe, right, I'm just kind of I'm not gonna, I'm just, you know, doing the exercise is, then I get to see what is active and interesting and unresolved and up, in my mind, and sometimes, you know, I'm, I don't really sometimes I'm so busy involved in certain activities and planning talks or something that I haven't really kind of let the mind show itself fully what it's concerned about. And I find it very useful and very important to sometimes give up control and just discover what's there. But other times, it's helpful to take control, and or to have some, you know, some choice involved in what we do with the mind. So to have faith confidence that I can do that, and that it's valuable to do that, as opposed to have confidence in faith in other things. If Martian anthropologists came to, to down to earth, and followed you around for a while, followed maybe or an ordinary American around. What would you think they thought they could understand language or they just watched behavior? What do you think they think they would conclude, people had confidence in. Probably nowadays, their screens, those screens, they spend a lot of time in front of screens, they must be really important when you see people kind of particular they even walk kind of a particular way that supports their screens, you know, the cup one hand and they hold things up in front of them, they're bent over. And they don't really see other people on the sidewalk and what's going on and when other people don't have much confidence in people anymore. It seems like the devices or TV or you know, what do people have confidence in? And what do you have confidence and if you kind of step back, not in what you believe you have confidence in. But if you look at your behavior, so but to have confidence in the practice, to have confidence in yourself as a practitioner, to have confidence that it's valuable to monitor your own heart and mind so that the best of you and best qualities of heart and mind have a chance to grow and develop. To have confidence in the value of not holding on tight to things to begin to loosen up to be hold things likely. The second Faculty is effort, energy. And this is a hugely important aspect for meditation practice and for mindfulness. Because we want to find just the right balance of not too much effort. And not too little. If it's too much effort, there's too self centered effort. It's too too much controlling effort trying to make things happen effort, we tend to agitate the mind and kind of tighten up in a way that's not helpful. If we don't make any effort, if we're just only trusting Oh, everything's gonna be okay, I just trust, then we're not really engaged in the practice. So we have to offer something, but not too much. And finding the right balance is a constant discovery. Because when you're really tired, or something, sometimes more effort is needed. If you're agitated, maybe less effort is needed sometimes are the times more effort is needed. more effort

means maybe you make more effort to see clearly, to show up to do mental noting to really kind of be engaged in the practice. The third faculty is that of mindfulness. And mindfulness means that you're going to really be aware of what you're doing when you're doing it. So you're tracking what's happening, you're here, mindfulness has a lot to do with present moment awareness. And so to cultivate the ability to be at a heightened awareness of what's happening in the present moment, and that's a muscle that you can develop, some of us develop the muscle of distraction, of thinking about the past, thinking about the future, being in fantasy, whatever we do regularly becomes a habit becomes a get strengthened. And so it's possible to strengthen the muscle of present moment awareness by developing by emphasizing it.

And so that's the practice of mindfulness showing up being present. And what's nice about mindfulness in terms of the other faculties, it's the one that allows us to track the others, and help bring them into balance. Without mindfulness, you're not going to monitor yourself and what's happening in the presence. The fourth faculty is concentration, which is more than just being aware of something. But it means having a stable, focused attention on what's happening. So to really kind of be fully present for something when you're there, awareness can be very broad, it can take in many things at once. But to really kind of narrow the attention and just really be here. So for example, if you're meditating, it might be the attention gets narrowed or focused on breathing. And that helps settle the mind stabilize the mind. There are a variety of different ways that the Samadhi concentration factors can be developed. But generally, it's understood to be one of really focusing on something. But then how to focus is important. So we learned some part of their learning of their faculties how to use it in an effective way. When I was first practicing Vipassana in Thailand, I did it with the help of a translator with my Thai teacher who didn't speak English. And there was a curious phenomena that happened. For a few days, I went for interviews every day. And I would go to the teacher and say, Well, now I'm starting to get concentrated. And then the translator would translate it. And then the teacher would say something. And the translator would say something like English. So I would say, target concentrated. And to say its shortest k briefly, we'll come back to me. The Abbot would say, Oh, good, you're becoming calm. I'm not gonna I'm getting concentrated. Oh, good. You're getting calm. And the, so I couldn't understand, you know, why, you know, what was how we were missing each other. Because for me, calm and concentration were two different things. Until I realized for him, they were the same, or they were came together. And so that's one of the things I had to learn, I had to learn if I'm going to be focused and concentrated, that the mind is supposed to get soft and calm in the process. And I was overly zealous, you know, kind of boring into the experience. And so to learn how to have this focus attention, in a calm, soft way, was a very important part of this. And then of the wisdom part, and I kind of like the word discernment for translating paññā because, wisdom, I don't know it's a great word, wonderful word to be wise. But maybe it lends itself to the idea that you're supposed to learn something and have portable knowledge with you about to be wise. The idea of paññā This is something that's it's being discerning. In the present moment, seeing what's here, and in a clear insight into the present moment, then we're wise, the wisdom comes from clear seeing, not because we have read a lot of books about Buddhism. So discernment, also, because discernment implies that you're able to make very good distinctions. And this ability to make distinctions is a very important part of Buddhist spirituality, to be able to distinguish between one thing and another, what's useful and not useful with skillful and not skillful. And so to get back to the surgeon, right, if you're going to have brain surgery, you would like to, you probably want to have a surgeon who really knows how to make very precise distinctions. You know, it really kind of see the difference, you know, rather than to Oh, it's like you said, you know, we'll just go chop this out. And, you know, you know, the more the better distinctions they can make, the more refined and subtle they can make the incision and maybe do their work. So, with our minds, we want to be able to start making the distinctions and the primary distinction is what's useful and not useful. So as we're monitoring the five faculties, what, what is what kind of faith is useful, what is not useful, what

kind of energy is useful, what is not useful, how to be mindful in a useful way, what to be mindful of that useful, and what kind of concentration what kind of focus is useful and not useful.

So to kind of be able to track all this. And it's also important to track to be wise about wisdom, to be discerning about discernment. And this is crucial in this way I'm talking about today. Because when, when we're talking about what we can do, or we control what we have some mastery over, it lends itself to people being too controlling, to manipulating to fixing and, you know, to project oriented with practice. And so we have to be discerning about whether we're being appropriately discerning. Are you being too analytical, to kind of involved in looking at the details such a way you get all wrapped up around it? Or is it helping you supporting you to get calm, to get still to be open. And this ability to know that the discernment has a lot to do as it helps you to become settled, open, kind, compassionate, peaceful. And the very way in which we're discerning is supposed to be that way as well. So what is it that supports you in this direction of becoming more calm, settled, open, peaceful, one of the things we can see through this process is to know what is useful to let go of, and to learn how to let go of that which we don't need anymore. This is a very important part of Buddhism, because when we hold on, then there's a clenching or contraction or a limitation we put ourselves under. And so to understand, now, we can let go of that. So some people, it's only when they're on their deathbed, that they finally realize how much they can let go off, or they're willing to let go. And some occasionally a profound peace arises because they let go of so many things that they weren't unwilling to do a normal, ordinary life. And the way Buddhist spirituality is a kind of premature dying, in that we're not trying to die. But we're hoping, hoping to learn that lesson of what we can let go of a lot earlier, to let go much more deeply and effectively. So some of the benefits of this, of the radiance, peace and calm that can come can happen earlier in our life. And the last thing I'd like to say this morning is that it's helpful to be discerning about the words we use when we teach. And so these were like controlling, letting go accepting all these rich, rich words that are so helpful to kind of be part of the terrain to explore and all that. But the word letting go is one of those words that you know, we have to be discerning about how we use it. Because it can give people sometimes the wrong impression, or people let go the wrong things or all kinds of things. So I'd like to end with an alternative word to letting go. And that is opening up. So maybe it's the same, maybe it's the same same inner thing has to happen. But rather than emphasizing what we let go of, we're emphasizing That we're never opening up letting go. You know, sometimes I say, if you let go of the diving board, you're sick. You know, it's kind of frightening. But if you open up, you know, then you're more radiant, you're more available you more present. So to, to follow or track the five faculties in you and yourself. They energy, mindfulness concentration and wisdom to see how those abilities, those facilities that you have that capacities you have, can support you to be more and more open, open hearted, open minded, open sided, just more open to open up. And so when the mountains come, you're ready. So thank you all.