

## The Five Faculties Part I

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I just came back from teaching for a week at IRC, and the people who are responsible for our C spent a lot of time discussing the coronavirus. Because people come there and gather to live together for a week at a time, we have to consider all the possible scenarios of what might come. In some ways, I or C are kind of leading the discussion in terms of IMC. C is just starting up now a serious discussion about how to better take care of this building. People who come here, and there's already some efforts to sanitize, disinfect, and things like that. So it's all in progress.

What I want to say about this is that, you know, we hopefully live a wise, practical life in the world. But, you know, in Buddhism, we also live a wise spiritual life in the world. For that, I am kind of delighted by, at least in my little mind, that every time I hear the expression "coronavirus," I hear "corona"—and corona is the Sanskrit Pāli word for compassion. Wouldn't that be nice if there was a compassion virus that somehow spread, and we all got it? More importantly, it's an ethical play on the words.

I think that a really important part of what we contend with, work with in Buddhist practice, is the degree to which we are self-focused and the degree to which we are other-focused. What's the balance for that? What's the right place for that here and there? If we think of this as a play on that word, corona, and corona as being a kind of pointing to both directions, for some people, the primary concern around this current pandemic of flu that's being spread is mostly how to protect themselves. It turns out that most of the ways that we protect ourselves are ways of protecting others, too. I think it actually helps to spend more time, perhaps change the balance a little bit, so that you're actually thinking more about others than yourself, and you'll be protecting yourself at the same time.

The way I think about this is that we're all, potentially, able to get some virus like this or any kind of cold or flu or something, and we're also the carriers of it and transmitters of it. In fact,

probably for most colds and flus that go around, we're probably all of us more frequently transmitters of it than we actually get the thing ourselves. If that's the case, then I think it's kind of nice to shift whatever balance you have to live your life now in this new corona world, thinking about others, and thinking about how to support and care for others. So, you know, how you wash your hands, how you use commonly touched items, what you do when you have a sniffle—these are all kinds of ways that you can be in the world to make it better for others, as opposed to just protecting yourself. You might end up doing exactly the same thing from the outside, but your heart will feel so much more different in terms of the spiritual Buddhist side of it, and your whole demeanor and way to life will probably be a lot better if you shift the directionality of what you're caring for.

I think it probably has health benefits, because to operate under fear—my guess is psychology affects physiology, and fear probably is not a good thing for an immune system. But compassion is. If it's the same outward behavior, choose the compassion side. So when you hear "corona," maybe you'll hear "compassion" and think about how that's how you can live. So is that okay for now on that topic?

Besides that topic, since I was on retreat this last week, I don't have anything new to think about except for the theme of the retreat. So that's what I'd like to share with you. I taught the retreat with two wonderful teachers, Don Scott and Nisha Patel, and we shared the theme through the week. I was inspired by the theme. Maybe some of my talking today can share that inspiration.

The theme in the title or the concept that was talked about in and of itself might not sound inspiring. A common way of saying it in English, it's a common English term, is the five faculties. Are you inspired yet? The five faculties are five abilities that we have—it could be called five abilities—that are activated and engaged in doing every activity we do in life. For Buddhist meditation practice, we look at how these five are activated in Buddhist practice.

The word for that was translated as faculties. Occasionally you see people translate it as the five controlling faculties, and now the word "control" is not very popular in Buddhist circles in the United States. It may be partly because some people control too much, through controlling everything. Learning to relax and not control everything is an important step in people's practice, so it's not that often you hear it translated as controlling faculties, only occasionally. What's more interesting is what the Pāli name is. The Buddhist word that's being translated as faculties is *indriya*, and *indriya* means something like "of the god Indra."

Indra is a god of ancient India and Vedic times, and came into Buddhism as a well-respected god in ancient Buddhism, with certain qualities. Indra was considered a friend of Buddhists,

a friend of the Buddha, a kind of protector god, protected people, and associated with protecting people from evil and bringing beneficial nourishment and nutriment into people's lives—a kind of benevolent figure. Indra was also, for a certain period of time, the ruler of the heavens, the ruler of the gods. So, "of Indra." Here, in this wonderful way, which the Buddha sometimes reframed or flipped things around—at least in the way I read it—instead of focusing on the deity or divinity that's outside of ourselves, he is pointing to what's divine, or the divinity inside of ourselves. Metaphorically, these five faculties have such an important role that they are divine, or our divinities, or associated with this great ruler of the gods.

That says a lot about the early Buddhist view of the human being: that we have these wonderful faculties within us that have huge potential. They have the potential to protect us, to be our friends and nourish us, protect us from evil or bad tendencies. They also have the potential to guide us, to lead us, to move us in a good direction. In that sense, they're kind of like rulers of our inner life. What I find fascinating about this is the idea that there are five capacities inside of us that protect us, guide us, control in some way, or rule or move us in a healthy, good direction, that are not what we normally would take as being "me, myself, and mine."

The degree to which we organize ourselves around self, around our self-identity, about "me" and what I'm supposed to get, what I'm supposed to do, especially in terms of control and accomplishing things—"I'm in charge, I'm going to protect myself, I'm going to get something"—and here there are these five things which are within us, but in some ways can feel that we live in relationship to them. We support them and develop them. They're within us, but they're not us. To have these powerful things within us—when they become powerful, they course through us, and we really feel the goodness and the strength and the power of them as they work through our system. It may be unfortunate to say "impersonal" about them—that seems kind of dry—but then we have in California "transpersonal," which, you know, is no longer the transpersonal in student psychology used to be, and now it's Sophie College, but they went from this transpersonal idea to the feminine wisdom. One of the five faculties is wisdom.

So, to something which is within us but not what we normally identify as us, and we are evoking them and developing them. I'll give you the common English names for these five. As I give this talk, what would be ideal is if, as you listen to it, you identify these in yourself—not in terms of ideas, "Oh yes, I guess I have that, I read about that"—but rather you recognize it in action, how they operate for you. Some of the words I'll use initially maybe don't speak for you, but I'll offer other words as well. Commonly, the five are faith, energy, mindfulness,

concentration, and wisdom.

We begin with faith, which maybe I'll most inspire at the moment to talk about. Maybe that's what gets the most press. The Pāli word for faith is *saddhā*, *śraddhā* in Sanskrit. I'm beginning to feel like I like to give more the Pāli names and Sanskrit more than I used to, because I'm appreciating how many people come to IMC who have an Indian background, and so when I especially use Sanskrit, those words mean something for them. It's part of their modern language as well. So *śraddhā* or *saddhā* is a wonderful term, and it's a term which is kind of a concept or an activity of the heart.

When we say, I use the English word "faith," it often, for some people, is associated with believing in a creed, like, "This is my faith," and you have to believe something on faith, meaning you have to believe it's based on no evidence whatever, but you should believe it—something like that. But that's certainly not what *saddhā* means in Buddhism. What I like to point out is that rather than seeing faith as something we believe, we can maybe see faith as something we believe in. If we look at the ancient, the original meaning of the word "belief," the etymological source of it, the word "belief" in the Middle Ages did not refer to the creed in which you adhered to, the ideas that you can believe. In English, we say "I believe in God" or "I believe in something," and that means that you think it's true. The original meaning of belief was what you love, what you hold dear, what you care for.

Then you have a whole different feeling for what belief is. What do you love? What do you put your heart into? What do you do wholeheartedly? What do you care for? What do you hold dear? That has a whole different feeling than in English.

The other thing that belief is used for in English—I think it's a beautiful expression—when you say, when someone tells you they believe in you. What a great expression, I think. To believe in someone means to have confidence in them and to really trust and value who they are, to have some sense, real, clear confidence in the direction their life is going and what they're doing. When someone tells you, "I believe in you," you know, that's kind. I imagine a child being told, maybe a child growing up with no one ever telling them that or indicating that. Imagine some child growing up with people believing in them—"You know you can do it, you can find your way, and you have value."

So what is it that you love? What is it that you care for? What is it that you value and esteem? In the early Buddhist tradition, the word *saddhā* had to do specifically, most concretely, with the kind of faith, belief, confidence with which you would start your Buddhist practice as a beginner. You don't know anything about it. You've never meditated, never done any practice at all. It would be like learning a musical instrument, or learning a craft or something

you've never done before, and you have to have some faith or belief or confidence that it's worthwhile to learn it, that you can do it.

So you would, you know, and that would get you going. Once you got it going for a while and did your training in the instrument, or if you got your—everyone's so self-conscious now, it's like, you know, as we should hold everybody in our hearts at the same time—you start learning your musical instrument or your craft, whatever it is, and after a while you get the hang of it, you develop a skill, and then it's no longer faith, "I can do it," but now you have evidence that you can do it, and now you have evidence-based confidence, "Yes, I can do this." I had to learn how to snap my fingers. I remember still learning that as a teeny kid, and you know, that was hard. Now I don't have faith I can do it. Now I have confidence, at least for now, before arthritis gets worse.

Buddhist practice is the same way. To have faith is how we get started. If you go take a simple class in mindfulness now in the local YMCA or community center or something where it's available so many different places, it doesn't take a lot of confidence to do it. It doesn't take a lot of faith. It's just like now your doctor prescribes it or something, your therapist prescribes it, your mother prescribes it, and so people try it out, you know, without any really high expectation for what it will do for them. Maybe just a matter of a little bit of stress reduction, which is great.

But classically, the Buddhist path was much more than just a little bit of stress reduction or pain relief. It was really a path for liberation, and to really step onto that path for its full potential of freeing the heart from whatever afflicts it, freeing the heart from all any ways in which it's contracted, or limited, or held down, or caught, entangled in its web of preoccupations and self-concern. To really find freedom from that is a phenomenal path to be on. It's a path of a lifetime. To step onto that as a beginner takes a little, but a higher degree of faith or confidence than it does, you know, just going to the way for a little bit of mindfulness, and so the *saddhā* has a very important role.

So how does it get triggered? How does it be awakened enough so that it really becomes something that enlivens us or engages us or something—"This is what I want, this is what I believe in, this is what I have, I'll give faith in, provisional faith, in order to try it out"? Some people get that from meeting someone else who really somehow embodies some of the qualities of the Dhamma, of practice, or freedom. That really inspires them a lot. Certainly that was my case when I was in the early years of practice. Even while I was practising, I would meet these people and say, "Wow, this really speaks to me. This really resonates with something inside of me. This is something that I want more than I want. This is something that

I believe in, I love, I hold dear. This speaks to something about who I actually am, or what seems to be a place of being at home or being in this world in a complete way.”

For some people, it's hearing teachings or reading teachings. Sometimes the teachings are so clear for them that I've had people tell me the scales fell from their eyes, and, you know, they were reading a book, and from one book to—you know, “the scales fell from my eyes,” one person said. Then, you know, her whole life was changed in a radically different way. Some people, it's a Dharma talk, and that Dharma talk somehow does something to them. Why? I've no idea.

One of my favorite little stories, which is not uncommon, is people go to a Dharma talk and the Dharma talk is about suffering. “Oh, these Buddhists and their suffering,” and they are so inspired because it's life-changing, because they grew up in a situation, in society, in a culture, at family, schools, whatever—no one ever talked about suffering. It was all hidden, pushed away, denied, avoided at all costs, or explanations were given for it that just didn't make any sense to them. The information wasn't understandable. Then to have teachings where suffering is put center stage—“We address this, we look at this, we take it seriously. We're the people who really look at suffering, not to suffer better, but rather to work through it to the other side.” This idea of liberation from suffering is the simplest way of talking about liberation in Buddhism.

Some people hear that and it's life-changing—“Oh, you can do this. Someone's finally talking about it, finally my life makes sense, this all makes sense, this is what I want to do in my life.” Then some people will change their life and do something different, something totally different. One of my favorite little stories of someone kind of suddenly being changed by the encounter of Buddhism is a friend of mine who was out riding his motorcycle. He just drove over the state on his motorcycle, young man, and drove down this long dirt mountain road and came to the end of the road. It was Tassajara Zen Monastery. He'd never known anything about Buddhism or anything, but there it was. He didn't leave. Later he left, but, you know, he became a Zen priest and teacher and the whole thing. So, you know, people encounter things and meet things.

Some people, their faith is—maybe, I know it's a negative faith. Some people come to a point in their life where they not only have given up faith in everything else, but they've reached rock bottom, and nothing else matters anymore, nothing else works, and they just lie in that total desperation of totally nothing. They sense in where nothing works, somehow or other, “Well, I might as well try this Buddhist thing.” So they put themselves into that practice, and then something begins to cook and to work for them. Some people are inspired because

something they hear or see in the Dhamma resonates very deeply with something inside, something they already know in themselves, something they've touched and experienced that maybe they don't have words for, and they say, "Here it is. This is what I've been looking for. This is what I've been trying to find a place for, to express in my life, or to touch into again."

It's not uncommon for people to have, for example, spent time in nature a lot as kids. I've met people who grew up in the countryside, on farms and stuff, and they were left alone to roam around and spend lots of hours in the woods, and they touched something in there that was so important for them. Sometimes when they come to Buddhist practice or encounter it, that's what they're talking about. Sometimes it's in all kinds of small things that we have as children, maybe that we touched. Not a few people come to Buddhism and rediscover not their inner child, but the inner goodness that they experienced here and there as a child.

For me, I remember it was after I started doing meditation retreats that during my meditation, sometimes I had this experience that was kind of in my chest—a kind of feeling of wholeness, warmth, a certain kind of poignancy of goodness that kind of felt there. "Oh, this is the experience that I, as a little kid, maybe seven, eight, nine years old, that I called 'on the edge of the pillow.'" It always happened as I was going to sleep at night. So I was laying on the edge of the pillow, I guess, and I'd just be laying there peacefully, and this feeling would well up inside my chest and my mind, this warmth, this wholeness, this goodness. I used to just feel it, and I didn't know what it was. I didn't have any context for it, or it never occurred to me to do anything with it or think much about it, except I just knew, "There it is—the Edge of the Pillow Experience. How nice!"

Then, you know, twenty years later, something close to that, meditating on a week-long retreat, "Hey, wait a minute. I remember this. I hadn't thought about it for many years. Wait a minute—there it is. That's the experience." That certainly inspired my faith. "Well, this is good. I'm touching something, that it's accessible in a way I never knew you could access it—not exactly at will, but you do something that would touch into this childhood thing." So there are many things that inspire faith, and that faith gets us started.

Some people prefer to call it confidence, and some people translate it that way. However, confidence is like a reserve for confirmed faith. That's the idea—as we engage in practice, what started us in the practice, something begins happening to us. We experience for ourselves, "Oh, this is right. This is true. This works." You know, we start learning the musical instrument, and after some time, "Well, yes, it's true. I can learn an instrument. It took many hours, but I could do it, and so I can meditate. I can live a life that's ethical. I can cultivate my

compassion, kindness. I can do these things, and I am doing it,” and that can give birth to a little bit of confidence—”Yes, I can do it, and I’ll get around to it when I retire.” No, not then. ”I’ll do it, you know, on my deathbed.” But then, you know, you might forget.

To awaken a kind of enthusiasm: ”Yes, I can do it. This is not only worth doing, this is maybe worth putting at the center of my life.” Then it becomes a confidence. There’s actually a Pāli word for this kind of confidence. There are two kinds of faith: there’s *saddhā*—I reserve the word faith—and then the confirmed confidence is called *aveccappasāda*, which has the meaning of a confidence born of knowledge. Confidence comes from knowing something for yourself, and now you don’t have to believe it in terms of taking someone else’s word for it. You know it. If you know it now, you can believe it in the sense of loving it, of caring for it. You have something you care for. It’s valuable. Now I believe, I love, I care for.

That’s Bhikkhu Bodhi, that big translator for our texts. He translates this *aveccappasāda* as unshakable confidence, unshakable faith, or unshakable confidence—I forget, maybe unshakable confidence. They have unshakeability, and certainly for myself and other people that I have been practising for a long time, you get this sense of, ”This is unshakable. I know this for sure. This is true. This is really possible. This really is something that I want to organize my life around.” It’s not uncommon for people, as the practice deepens, to understand that this movement towards freedom, this movement to let no longer be operating under any kind of attachment or clinging or selfishness that so much of life is organized around—that this is not how I want to base my life anymore. This doesn’t make sense to keep that at the center of my life. I am now going to practise in the direction of putting this Dhamma at the center, the practice at the center, which in very personal terms I hope means something like, ”Now I put at the center my heart’s capacity for freedom, my heart’s capacity to live with goodness, without greed, hate, and delusion, without selfishness, without being closed or tight or caught up in my entanglements.” It’s not easy to do that, but that’s what I want to be involved in, and that’s what I want to put at the center of my life.

So for you now, there’s a range of what faith and confidence can mean for people, but as it gets stronger, it becomes a force inside of us. It’s not just a policy that we have like, ”Oh, what should I do today? I think I’ll have faith.” You don’t check it off your to-do list, ”Yes, I have faith,” and that’s it. Rather, it’s something that is integral to what we are realizing for ourselves, what we’re experiencing for ourselves, what we’re actually seeing in ourselves—the change, the movement of practice, what it’s like to show up and be mindful, and to hold things in a way that is not perpetuating the clinging and the selfishness that can exist. So it becomes kind of like a force, like a power that protects us, that guides us, that is our friend,



that wants the best of us, that's going to protect us from evil—our own evil, strong word, I guess none of us have evil, but you know, lousy stuff.

So we call it in India something of the god, the deity, Indra. Maybe now you can begin appreciating why we might want to interpret this idea that we have something that's so special, that we'll happily borrow the English word "divine," or if we want to anthropomorphize it, or de-anthropomorphize it, it has a—you don't call it—the divinity inside, the divinity, the divine qualities of faith that we can have. Faith is only one of these five divine qualities inside. Each of the other ones also can be developed and understood. We really have this beautiful quality, beautiful kind of force, momentum that lives in us, that grows and develops over time.

We don't have much time to go over the next four. Maybe I can do that next week. But I want to say that each of these—they give you maybe a little sense to awaken, a little bit of a sense in us of how we can relate to these, or the role we can have in our lives. There are five actions that we can do in relationship to these, five ways of relating to them. So the faith we can trust, the faith; the second, energy, we can enjoy. Most people don't think of effort, like you have to make effort, as enjoyment, but this energy, this effort, we can enjoy. When it becomes a power, it has more of that quality.

Mindfulness, we can love mindfulness. Something really consists as a kind of object of love. After all, mindfulness loves you if you give it half a chance. The fifth, concentration—I prefer the word *samādhi*—concentration, you can revere. Concentration is something to have reverence for. Isn't that something? So that kind of speaks a little bit to the specialness of what this *samādhi* is. That is something to revere. Then wisdom is something to heed, something to listen to. You have within you the capacities, powers, momentums, divinities, divine qualities of wisdom, of understanding, of discernment that can guide us and support us in the directions we go in our life, and how we find our path, and how we live. It's your wisdom. It's not like somebody else is telling you what to do. When that wisdom quality has been evoked, then the relationship we have to it is to heed it, listen to it, go along with it, let it guide you.

So, five divine qualities inside. I think occasionally in English people call them five spiritual faculties. There are five faculties that you use probably in every activity you're involved in. It's a fascinating exercise to do—to take some ordinary activity like driving a car or cooking a meal or, you know, almost anything you do, and you can actually see how each of those five ordinary, very human faculties in some way come into play in what you're doing. Sometimes they come into play because you realize that one of the five is missing or is weak, and so that's one of the things why you're getting tripped up in how you're doing it. But you'll see

that it's all there. Some things you do are so natural, so easy, you don't realize that these are operating or present until you get injured or get sick or something happens and you can't do it. You know, everyone thinking of people who can walk—think of walking as nothing. Then when you have injuries in your leg, you know, walking is not that easy, and so then it becomes a whole other thing. I realized I used to have a lot of faith in my ability to walk. It was just so easy. I didn't ever have to think about it, but I certainly did, and now I'm not so sure I can.

Anyway, it's interesting to look in all your—choose some activities during this week and analyze the presence of these five faculties, and you might find it very interesting and enlivening to see how these five play out. Or if you don't understand the other four yet, come back next week. So we have a couple of minutes. If we have any questions that you want to ask, or you want to say about it, you're welcome to the mic. Did you want to say something?

Oh, yes. So I'm just recollecting that in the Dhammapada, I think it actually says to really—it's especially important to cultivate the five faculties, to—it's like one of the most important things that we can do. I think you're hinting at the balancing of the five, how they balance each other out. Faith and wisdom, energy and *samādhi*, and mindfulness is sort of the anchor in the center. So, just to enter that comment. Great, thank you.

Then on, yes, can you move his head straight back? Etete turned on, what is concentration? Come back next week if I can get to two of them, then I can get to, you know, to concentration next week. But concentration is the simple idea, for the purposes of these five faculties, is that of the third one. Mindfulness is our ability to be aware or to recognize what's happening. Concentration or *samādhi* is the ability of our whole system, not just our control tower, to sustain that awareness through time. So there's awareness and then sustained awareness, and those two aren't radically separate. Many people can have moments of mindfulness, but to have the mind, the awareness, continue in a smooth, easy kind of momentum of its own that really keeps us in the present moment with our experience, that's the function of *samādhi*. Great.

One last one. Yes, do you mind expounding on the difference between having, say, unshakable confidence and no attachment? It seems like the kind of thing that can be at war with each other in some ways. "I have unshakable confidence that it's good to keep my hand open and not grip anything." I ought to think about that. So there can be a powerful confidence in the value of non-clinging that actually supports us to be relaxed and not clinging. It's interesting to ask this, because the word *pasāda* that's in this unshakable confidence, the word for confidence, it's the word *pasāda*, which also has the meaning of serene or peaceful. So it's not zealous confidence. It has its unshakable and strong, but built into it is this feeling of

peacefulness.

At the retreat, one of the teachers was talking about the energy factor, the second, effort, and she talked about that the effort needed should be relaxed and relentless. So there, again, we have that problem that you're pointing to, right? Sometimes we have the idea that these things can't coexist. Being unattached doesn't have to come with having no energy. It can come with a tremendous upsurge of wonderful, healthy vitality that flows into our life, doing things wholeheartedly. So we're going to stop. Yes, ye, ye, ye.

Oh, Richard says that when you pass the mic, you know, these days we want to clean our hands afterwards, because who knows what came your way? And you know that's true. So one of the ways of living a generous, compassionate, caring life for others is to pick up a new practice. They say that you can be awakened, fully, totally enlightened in any activity that you give yourself over to wholeheartedly. Really do this activity like it's the only thing you're doing at that moment. It's the most only thing to do, the most important thing. You do nothing else, just there for that. So who knows? You might get fully, totally enlightened. You might be the next Buddha if you do that with washing your hands. Wash your hands like this is the one thing that needs to be done. Don't do it impatiently. Don't think about what's next. Don't get over it. If you want to get through washing the hands quickly, so you can do the important things in life, then I guarantee that you won't get the full practice potential of washing the hands. You'll shortchange yourselves. So go forth into the world and take on the practice, the enlightening practice. Make it enlightening. Make it an enlightening practice to loan. Have all five faculties come into play as you wash your hands. Enjoy your week. Thank you.