

Faith (2 of 5) Trust And Safety

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Good morning and good day. We continue today with the second talk on faith in Buddhism. Often, “faith” is the common translation of *saddhā*. One translation I like for that Pali word is “trust.” The concept of trust is one that I feel deep inside of me; something very rich and valuable.

In some ways, I feel more connected to *trust* than I do to the word *faith*. Both words I love. To me, trust speaks a bit more to a capacity, an inner quality of heart, which we’re evoking in practice. The residual association I have with the English word “faith” has to do with a belief system and is a bit more intellectual than something which is more embodied and connected to our emotional life.

I associate trust, the ability to live in trust, with living without fear. I don’t have to be afraid of this thing or this person that I trust. Faith, trust, is felt as a deep sense of safety or an absence of fear. It is kind of a deep assurance. Some of this is a capacity we can develop; the capacity to be without fear and to feel safe.

That’s an important thing to appreciate because if we only know how to be safe by rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, it’s not going to make us so safe. Some people think they have to arrange and line up everyone and everything so that they can feel safe. The problem with that is it might work for a moment, but things are always shifting and changing, and then we have to do it again.

Sometimes the very effort to control other people or to get them to behave a certain way so that we feel safe creates a kind of alienation, a separation, that doesn’t actually work. We can’t really become safe by forcing or requiring other people to be a certain way for our sake. Maybe that’s not the best way to find safety in relationships.

One of the things human beings are capable of is developing and growing the inner capacity to trust, to live without anxiety and fear, and to be free in a way that we are not as affected by the things of the world. We can become more porous. Things don’t hit our identity, our ego – what we hold onto as “me, myself, and mine.” Maybe there’s not the contraction of fear that world events hit inside of us. We’re not impacted as much by those events in some heart way.

We develop a capacity of trust and safety inside. Some of that has to do with the Buddhist idea of cultivation. A very important part of Buddhism is to develop and cultivate all kinds of inner strengths. One of those strengths is faith. Another is a strength of engagement, of practice, of efforting – the ability to do and engage. Another strength is mindfulness itself. Our ability for concentration, stability, and steadiness can become stronger and stronger. Our capacity for wisdom, discernment, seeing clearly what’s going on can be developed. The growth of inner strengths reinforces faith, trust, and our capacity to feel we’re capable of holding and being with what’s there.

I love the word “capacity” because it has two meanings in English for me. One is that it’s an ability to do something. When people say they have great capacity, it means they have a great ability to do certain things. Another meaning of capacity is the ability of a container to hold liquid or water. A teaspoon can contain a little bit of water. A cup can contain more water. A gallon jug contains more. A lake will contain much more water. And an ocean contains even more. Our capacity to hold something can grow and develop.

The capacity for our mind and heart to be aware of things without contracting, reacting, and becoming afraid can grow as these inner qualities develop and get stronger. We are more able to hold things with some freedom and equanimity. The advantage of that is we bring our safety with us. Certainly, there are dangers in the world, but we’ve developed something powerful inside so that we’re less affected by and less fragile with what’s going on around us.

Some of that is developing faith and trust as a power. We have a deep reassurance that our life is supported in a way that is significant, helpful, and valuable. That reassurance and trust mean that we're not so caught up and concerned with the details of what happens.

For example, recently I thought I lost something important – my hearing aids. I think, years ago, when I had lost something like this, I would have gotten quite anxious and afraid. Now, I lost them. I looked for them. I had this simple reassurance and trust – “I can figure out what to do from there. I can find my way. If I have to, I'll get new ones.” I did find them eventually. This is a simple example of developing a capacity to be able to deal with some difficulty that in the past wouldn't have been so easy, but now I have equanimity and peace around it.

One of the really valuable things in Buddhism is to trust the practice. Trust that the practices of mindfulness, meditation, kindness, and compassion are powerful and valuable. We gain enough experience of practicing with them to feel confident – “These work.” We're confident they work and support us in many ways.

One of the ways the practice helps us is that we're confident, even if we don't know what needs to happen or how to find our way – “I have these practices that can keep me safe, without fear, and at ease.” It can support the situation to unfold in a healthy and good way. Somehow the situation will find a way forward and out of the challenge that exists.

We have deep trust in the practice. Maybe eventually, the trust in practice is greater than the trust in anything else. Certainly, greater than the trust in the US dollar bill that says, “In God We Trust.” How many of you trust money more than anything else? We trust the practice more than anything. In fact, at some point, there's a shift, where the practice helps us not to be so caught in me, myself, and mine. We are no longer at the center of the drama of our life because now the practice is at the center. That's such a liberating thing to have happen.

Related to the practice is trusting the Dharma, not the Dharma as teachings. Something transpersonal is operating that's not about me, myself, and mine. Maybe it's within us. There's an inner wisdom, an inner process unfolding and moving towards freedom, which is natural. It operates independent of the ego, self-preoccupation, and self-concern. Some people might call it transpersonal even though it may be within this psychophysical body. We begin having faith or trust in something within us, but that we don't identify as ourselves. This is a great freedom. To know and develop it gives us a lot of assurance.

So, faith as trust. And trust as a power that we carry with us. It's the power of being without fear. Certainly, we want to combine it with the power of wisdom so that we don't do foolish things with that absence of fear. To carry a deep, abiding feeling of safety that's not easily threatened by what happens around us allows us to offer the gift of safety and fearlessness to others. They have nothing to fear from us. Perhaps, we can be a reassuring presence in this world.

Finally, I'll say that the literal meaning of the word “reassurance” in the ancient Pali language is to breathe easily. May we all find the ability to trust and have faith in such a way that we can breathe easily going through our lives. Thank you.