

# Faith (4 of 5) Confidence in Non-Clinging

August 19, 2021

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

grasping, attachment, peace, *saddhā*

**Gil Fronsdal**

Today is the fourth talk on faith. The word *saddhā* in Pali is sometimes translated into English as “confidence.” One reason for this is that one of the primary purposes for *saddhā* (faith) is to have the confidence to engage in practice, and the confidence that by practicing you can make a difference. In the teachings of the Buddha, it is often clear that when someone learns the Dharma well enough to have faith, the purpose of that faith is for them to begin their practice. So this is not faith in some belief or some idea you are supposed to carry with you and apply to your life. Rather, it is the confidence that there is something worthwhile to do. It is worthwhile to practice, worthwhile to be mindful, to develop our *mettā*, our compassion, our equanimity, our generosity, or our clear seeing of what is happening here

As practice develops, and we begin to have some feeling for what practice is really about, a particular kind of confidence can arise. To people who haven’t experienced it well enough, this confidence might seem foreign, uninteresting, kind of bland, or unimportant because it concerns the absence of something. And how can the absence of something instill confidence? This confidence is in the absence of clinging, the absence of grasping, or the absence of attachment where attachment means clinging or grasping. It is confidence in non-clinging.

It is not always clear what to have confidence in. There are all kinds of questions or challenges we can have. But it can be very helpful to know that at some point we can have the clear confidence that it is not worthwhile to get attached, to cling, or to grasp onto things. It is important to have a clear experience of that, but not because it’s a belief. When people don’t have the experience of non-clinging, there can be all kinds of protests about why clinging, grasping, and attachment are useful and important. But when we have the experience of non-clinging, we have a clear reference point for seeing when clinging comes back, and feeling how it is to our detriment. Grasping actually diminishes or limits us, and interferes with bringing the best qualities of who we are into the world.

At some point, we start experiencing the benefits of non-clinging, and how wonderful it is. Maybe our confidence in practice is not completely strong yet. Then practice has to do with questioning and debating how important it is to not cling. Is it okay not to cling? Maybe we’re supposed to cling? Maybe in these areas, we have to be allowed to grasp or to get attached. How about here, and here? We naturally start to question, debate, and explore: “where do I fit? Is it okay not to cling? Is that really valuable?”

Rather than struggling and thinking it is wrong to question, I believe that at some point in practice, this becomes a healthy part of the practice – questioning, debating, taking both sides, being the devil’s advocate, looking at this deeply, and seeing. If you can find a really good reason why you need to grasp – it is for your betterment and the betterment of others – no one would stop you.

But if you are mindful and carefully attentive, and experience the peace, the well-being, and the benefits of non-clinging, you might start to have confidence, trust, and faith in non-clinging. Then faith (*saddhā*) is not a belief system. It is not faith in something that you’ve been told is a good idea, like practice. Now it has become a very important reference point for your life. We could say this reference point is peace, or a sense of happiness, or freedom, but to call it any of those takes the focus away

from what brought that peace, happiness, and well-being. In some very deep way, what brings peace is non-grasping, non-attachment, and non-clinging.

So we keep an eye on non-clinging, which is right there at the juncture where the real work exists, because very few people become totally free and peaceful once and for all. Most people can have a taste of non-clinging, and then they get caught up again. To have confidence in non-clinging puts us at that juncture where the practice really has great value. That is where the work is. It isn't that we have to let go. But maybe the confidence in non-clinging allows us to look at clinging in a deeper and deeper way – to really be present for it, and to realize it is important.

If the emphasis is on freedom, peace, or happiness, if we lose that, then we try to get it back, and we don't quite know where to go and where to focus. On the other hand, if the focus is only on non-clinging, or we only think about that, then we might not appreciate all the benefits that come from non-clinging. So ideally, we look at and stay aware of both.

For someone who has just begun to practice, I think that the benefits of non-clinging and the well-being that comes from it are right there at the beginning early on, but maybe in small, mundane, ordinary ways. When the shoulders relax a little, that is a letting go, and it brings a sense of well-being and a little more calm in the mind. But as practice gets deeper and fuller, the experience of non-clinging becomes richer and richer. At some point, confidence becomes phenomenally strong. We realize that there is nothing worth losing the non-clinging for – that with non-clinging, we can take better care of all the things in the world.

Non-clinging is a difficult thing to have confidence in, because often family, friends, and other people expect us and want us to get anxious about, caught in, or participate in the attachments that they are involved in, and to show that we care by getting afraid, anxious, angry, or upset. So it is a little bit hard when the people around us expect us to behave in ways that will call back our clinging. But we can discover strong confidence in non-clinging and not succumb to the social pressures to be otherwise.

This is not easy. This is where the debates, explorations, and a deeper look at what's going on are necessary. One way to understand the path of Buddhist practice is as a path to a greater and greater appreciation of non-clinging, a greater and greater confidence in it, and in the wake of non-clinging, the discovery of a tremendous sense of well-being, freedom, happiness, peace, and clarity. There are many words for what follows in the wake of non-clinging.

We don't want to reify, latch on, or cling to any of that well-being. By keeping the focus on non-clinging, we don't cling to what is wonderful. But non-clinging opens the door to what is wonderful. Then, if we stay close to non-clinging, maybe we won't cling to what's wonderful.

May it be that you share your wonderfulness, your goodness, your non-clinging. Share it with others in a generous, supportive, helpful way, so it is really clear to you that this practice is not just for yourself, but is also for the welfare of others. Confidence in non-clinging. Thank you.