

Faith Beyond Faith

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Good morning, everyone. Is it going to be a little bit louder? Let's see. Is it? I don't hear. Is it coming through? Now it's coming. Great.

Oh, I'm sorry. We have one more announcement. Thank you, Kristen. I've been on your walks. They're really wonderful. So this is just a very quick announcement. We have mindful parents next Sunday at 11:15 here and we're exploring the *Eightfold Path* and parenting. So please join us if you can.

And it's about mindful speech. So we do have a tea today and that everyone's welcome to stay and we have a kind of an abundance of goodies today because yesterday we had a memorial service here and there was lots of wonderful things left over. So please stay, if you'd like. And you'll see there's this bouquet of flowers in the outer hall. And that was left over from the memorial service. I put the program we had on the table there. Some of you might have known Trudy Opitz, who died. And we had a kind of a wonderful remembrance of her yesterday with family and friends. And so you can see the program if some of you knew her next to that stand of flowers.

So today I want to talk about a topic which may or may not be popular. And that topic is faith. And some people love this topic, some people just the word of it raises alarm for them. And I do hope that in the course of the talk, the talk will be inspiring something in you. And there's a number of steps that we're going to go through. The first is going to be something that maybe isn't so popular, but is linguistic. What word are we talking about? What do we mean when we use the word faith?

The important aspect of this is that part of Buddhism, the engagement for people who don't speak Pāli, didn't grow up with this ancient Buddhist language. Part of the, as we try to understand this tradition, there's a part of it that we get to make for ourselves. We get to understand

and construct the part of Buddhism that's really personal, personalize the religion in some very deep and important way. And there's a part of it, if you want to be engaged in Buddhism, it's not something you, it's your personal opinion, your personal, you know, whatever you'd like it to be, that's what you make it up. There is something which has some integrity to it, which is Buddhism. But what is that?

So what is it that you get to make up and personalize in some very important way? And what is it that you can't quite personalize and still call it Buddhism? So that's part of the journey of this talk as we go into this word faith. So it began with a story that before, when the Buddha, before he was Buddha, when he was Gotama, in his seeking for awakening, for the end of suffering, he practiced with different teachers. And he perfected what they had to teach, and they actually wanted him to be a teacher in their system. And he said, no, this is not it yet.

But he made this very interesting statement. He said, these teachers I have, they have a certain faith, they have faith, and I have faith. So I think I can go off and do it by myself. But he wasn't enlightened yet. There was no Buddha in the world yet to have faith in. There was no Buddhist teachings to have faith in. He used the word faith. That's something he had. And so it wasn't a belief in something, but it was a confidence in something. Was it in himself? Was it in something that wasn't quite himself? What was it that he meant by the word faith?

The word he's using in Pāli is *saddhā*. And that sounds great. Some of you have Indian background, maybe know it more as *śraddhā*. And so what is it that this, how do we translate this word into English? Some translators do not use the word faith, often for good reason. And the most common one they use is confidence. Sometimes people use the word trust. Those are the three kind of primary words.

But the word faith in English has a wide, rich range of meanings, some of them which have wonderfully evocative emotional qualities to it, heartfelt qualities, that the word confidence doesn't have. Confidence, as important as it is, I think for most people doesn't necessarily evoke some deep feeling of heartfelt trust or something really inspiring in the heart. Confidence is good. And so the other word that's often associated with faith in English is belief. Now what's fascinating about the word belief is that in its history, where it comes from, it comes from the word to love. *Lief* in Old English and in German meant to love.

And scholars of medieval religion say that there was no questioning whether you believed or didn't believe in God in 10th century, 12th century Germany or France or someplace like that. It was just taken for granted. But when you said you believed in God, what you were saying, you love God. And it's a different feeling. This is where I put my love. And so to believe, not as an act of just credence, like okay, I have to believe these in English, you know, I have to

kind of now accept these teachings as being true. That's not maybe what the original idea of belief is, but this is where I put my love.

So if faith and belief are related, is there something about faith that this is where I put my love? This is where my heartfelt feeling of value and appreciation and delight is in something. We use the word faith in many fascinating ways, I think, in English. Keep the faith. Partly means that keep the commitment. Keep your appreciation of something. Keep going with it. Being faithful to something means don't betray it. Being faithful in marriage, don't betray it. Stay to the commitment. It's more than having confidence.

You lose something if you keep translating *saddhā* as confidence. You lose a sense of love or commitment, a certain loyalty. Fidelity is related to the same roots, Latin roots as faith is related. But that means kind of a loyalty, the faith that we keep loyal and stay committed. All these words have different meanings for every individual, different associations. There's an expression in English, a person of faith. And for me, that just makes me happy when I hear that phrase. For other of you, probably it frightens you. So it all depends on the associations we have, right?

And so for me, the person of faith is someone who holds certain fundamental values of goodness. It is not about what they believe, but rather that they're ethical. A person of faith, I expect a certain high level of moral goodness at how they go through the world. I think of them as someone who's more gentle, not assertive, not domineering. Kind of a gentle kind of willingness to be of service from their love. So, what do these words mean for you? And that's where you get to make it up.

You get to take the word, ancient word *saddhā*, very important word in Buddhism, and decide for yourself what is the word that you would like, what English word works for you that inspires you, that's meaningful for you, that is useful for you to have. If translating as faith is not useful for you, don't translate it that way. If these, you know, well-meaning Buddhist teachers that use the word faith, just code switch. And just, okay, you know, that person said faith, so I'm going to use confidence. The teachers who like to use confidence for *saddhā* really want to emphasize practicing. You want to have confidence that this is something you can do. And so just like learning any kind of skill, it helps to have confidence in learning that skill.

So Buddhist practice involves developing skills. And so emphasizing the confidence side means, okay, I can do it, I'm going to engage. Some people like trust. There are plenty of times in my Buddhist career where I prefer to translate *saddhā* as trust. There was something profound that I really felt like I could rest in or rely on, that really would support me.

And one of the primary things that I trust fundamentally, that's come from doing this practice, is mindfulness itself. It's not a belief, but it's a capacity that I have. It's a practice or a capacity, a way of being, that I just trust more than anything else. Because it's proved reliable over and over again.

And then there's the word belief. And now that you know that belief, at least originally, meant to love, maybe you want to translate faith as something to do with love. Faith is where we put our heart in. So it's heartfelt. What we weren't willing to put our heart in and let our heart rely on. So in the ancient tradition in Buddha, faith was more a quality of personality, of character, more than a faculty that we have, more than an action that we do. So again, it's pointing to something deeper than many of the ways we think about, you know, having faith in something, but rather a faculty that we have that we can awaken. And what is that? What would it be for you?

So this is a part of Buddhism you get to make up for yourself, personalize. And the meaning of these words and how we play with them. So some of you have been around my teachings long enough, and probably more than I should, someone will ask a question and I'll say, well, that depends on what you mean by the word. Because that's a way of being careful and respectful for people. Because otherwise we might miss each other. Because we might have different definitions of the word. If we specify what we mean, I think it's much more we can find our way together. So this word *saddhā*.

So when the Buddha, before he was awakened, said, I have *saddhā*. And that gave him the trust, the faith, the confidence, the love to go off and practice. Also another story that Buddha tells before he was awakened was how he dealt with fear. He had fear. Isn't that nice to know? Some of you probably have occasional fear, anxiety and stuff. And so the Buddha did it as well. And he had to practice with his fear. That was something he had to contend with.

And the many of the Buddhist practitioners in his time went off into the forest to practice alone. And some fellow came along to the Buddha and said, well it's frightening to go into the forest and practice, isn't it? Is it too frightening to be able to practice? You can't get concentrated in the forest. And the Buddha said, well actually before I was awakened, I went into the forest too and practiced. But before I did, I checked myself out to make sure that I was prepared for that. And he said, do I have any sensual desire that's going to make it difficult to be in the forest alone? You're lusting after a person in the forest all the time. You're not going to get concentrated. So do I have any sensual desire? No. Do I have any ill will, any resentments left over? No. Do I have any resistance? Do I have any ways in which I'm caught in my fear, frozen in my fear? No. Do I have any agitation or regrets? No. Do I have any doubts?

No. Anybody who has these things would probably be afraid when they go into the forest.

Then he makes an interesting statement. Do I have any, the word is in English, alarm or terror? He's not an alarmist. Some people get alarmed by all kinds of things. But he said, no, I don't, I'm not an alarmist. And I don't get terrorized by things. So what he means by that, I don't know. It was kind of interesting. So what he's doing is checking himself out. And maybe if he had those things, he realized these have to, I have to work through these first. So he'd go to a therapist, you know, if he was in modern America. It can be very helpful for some of these things when they're really, really difficult. But you know, work through it. Or come and start basic meditation practice. Because that's a lot of what we're working through.

At some point, he was ready to go into the forest. And in fact, he was afraid. It's kind of a delightful little, I think, description of his fear. On especially auspicious nights, I dwelt in awe-inspiring, horrifying abodes as orchard shrines, woodland shrines, and tree shrines. And while I dwelt there, a wild animal would come upon me, or a peacock would knock off a branch, or a wind would rustle the leaves. I remember sometimes backpacking in this year as by myself, no one around for miles, dark in my little tent. And there were monsters walking, crunching the leaves around. What are these monsters doing around here? Crunch, crunch, snap. And, you know, if I was awake and it was daytime, you know, rustling of the leaves would not do anything for me. But in the dark, in the tent, there were times where I couldn't sleep.

So, but what he does, this is a footnote in the talk. So what he does, how he deals with his fear and practicing alone in the dark and these frightening places, was whatever posture he was in, he stayed in that posture and was mindful, present for that. And somehow staying present for it, not giving in to it, not running away, not collapsing around it, staying with it in a dignified way, somehow he worked through it. He doesn't go into the details here, but it's kind of that he was prepared. He was ready at this point in his life to sit or be really present for fear when it arose. But you saw he was prepared, right? So are we prepared for it?

So that this was important is not a coincidence. That he checked himself out, you saw what he had worked through and what he didn't have, is not a coincidence for what Buddhism is about. The part of Buddhism that you're not supposed to change. The part of Buddhism, if you want to do Buddhism, you have to kind of accept as being very important. And now we come to the topic of faith, *saddhā* again. That the emotional qualities the Buddha associates with faith, you get a sense of what it's about, is calmness, clarity, and confidence. Confidence, clarity, and confidence. So those are kind of the associated terms. It's not to be zealot. It's to be peaceful. Something that helps you be profoundly peaceful. So what is it that does

that?

And so to reach this level, and there's different levels of faith, but this level of faith that's really confident. And now there's going to be a fidelity to it. There's a loyalty. There's a commitment to something which is more than a belief. Something in a sense that maybe even in a sense more than the usual me that you identify with. Not transpersonal exactly, but not necessarily personal either. Something that maybe is in you, but which is not who you think you are. Could that be? To have faith in that, to have confidence in that. So, and this is the core confidence that, you know, the core kind of confidence that the Buddha really is pointing that it's possible for us to experience and grow in this practice.

So this is going to be a little bit boring. So, you know, you're forewarned. But it's also going to be phenomenally important. And I hope by the time I finish this talk, this is going to inspire you to no end. So be patient with the boredom. But listen to this. Listen to it as if it's a guided meditation, where the key words are pointing something deep inside of you, a possibility. Something that, if you really could do this in a thorough way, would be transformative. You don't have to believe anything. There's no creeds to have faith in. And some of you are going to think this has nothing to do with religion. And I came to Buddhism. It's a religion. And this is like, you fill in the blank. And some of this language you're not going to like. Some of you. So you're forewarned. You know, this is like, you know, caution. This is a caution statement.

There are these imperfections that defile the mind. Some of you don't like the word defile. And, but remember, you get to make up parts of your Buddhism. And what you can make up to some, within certain range, is how you translate these words into English. And I wouldn't translate it as defile. That's what this book, this, but anyway, there are these imperfections that defile the mind. Covetousness and unrighteous greed is an imperfection that soils the mind. Ill will soils the mind. Anger soils the mind. Resentment, contempt, insolence, envy, avarice, deceit, fraud, obstinacy, rivalry, conceit, arrogance, vanity, and negligence are imperfections that defile the mind.

What a list. Did you get bored? No? No, it's exciting? Edge of your seats. OK, so it's 17 things that he says soil the mind. Now imagine a world where humans didn't have this. Imagine really knowing and trusting someone you know who has none of this. Imagine what that would be like. Imagine if this was actually the common denominator of all religions, of all political parties, of all isms, was let's not have, let's not be covetous. Let's not have greed. Let's work through our ill will and our anger. Let's not have resentment and contempt. Let's find a way not to be insolent, envious, avaricious, deceitful, fraudulent, obstinate, rivalriness,

conceit, arrogance, vanity, negligence. Wow, what if that was the common denominator that we all shared? Wouldn't it be a different world?

I propose that there would be a revolutionary change in our societies if we all agreed, yes, we're not going to argue what you believe, we're not going to be opposed to what your political stance you have, all those things, provided we all agree on this. Wow. Wouldn't that be good? So these are the things that soil the mind, the Buddha said. But then, and this is the exciting part of the boredom, knowing that covetousness and greed is an imperfection that soils the mind. A person abandons it. Knowing ill will, one abandons it. Knowing each of these seven things, one abandons it. So that's pretty good. But then comes even the better part. Once it's been abandoned. Then you have a mind, you have a heart, in which those things are not present.

When a practitioner has known that covetousness and greed has been abandoned, when the practitioner knows ill will has been abandoned, anger, knows the absence of these things, knows the absence of resentment and envy and hostility and rivalry and really knows that absence. But knowing is not an abstract cognitive idea that's gone. What's the heart experience? What's the embodied experience? What's the mind experience of not having that agitation, the contraction, the pressure of these kinds of forces when they're operating in us? What's that absent like? Wow, that is peaceful. That's settled. That's a relief. Wow. I've known people who've had resentments for years and years. I've known people who've decades of their policy of how to live is to be angry. They carried with them the whole time. I've known people who for decades have had desire, greed be the driving force of their life. What a relief to finally have these kinds of powerful forces not operating. To know this possibility for oneself, to have experienced that kind of peace. This is what provides an unshakable, I think this translator calls it, or this translator does translate it, unwavering confidence. Some people did unshakable confidence in that possibility. The literal meaning in Pāli, again because remember, you get to have some, there's some choice here how you translate it. The English, the Pāli literally means confidence based on knowing. So you know something now for yourself. It's not based on trusting this book, or trusting me, but it's trusting what you've really experienced for yourself. If you have that, then, the Buddha says, you can have real confidence in the Buddha, in the *Dhamma*, in the *Saṅgha*, in Buddhism. Because what is Buddhism? What is the essence and what the purpose of Buddhism? At the foundation, it's not about a belief, but rather about doing this. Becoming free of these things that soil the mind.

And whereas like before I said, it'd be great if this could be the common denominator of all

religions, all isms. Not only is it the common denominator of Buddhism, Buddhist teachings. It's the purpose of Buddhist teachings. This is what's ultimate in Buddhism. It's not a glorious ultimate. It's not like, you know, you go to a block party and your neighbors say, what is this Buddhism you're doing? What is the purpose of it? As you pull out your list of 17 things, oh, the purpose is to be free of covetousness, greed, anger, envy. And by the time you finish the 17, you know, they've already gone off to someplace else or they're feeling sorry for you because their ultimate is cosmic consciousness. Their ultimate is, you know, some grand, glorious, sexy kind of thing, you know. Or even just something beautiful, like, their ultimate is love. Like, they listen to all, we don't hear all this, like, well, okay, I guess it's okay for you. But what about love? What about compassion? What about beauty? What about, you know, great spiritual states? These are great spiritual states. These are beautiful states. These are the doors that open so that we can have love and compassion and care for each other. These are profound things. So we might not be, we might not make an impression on our neighbors. But that's actually a good thing. Because I think we don't want to hold Buddhism up as being too special. Because that's one of the ways of soiling the mind. It's really special. But let's not be too caught up in it. Because this is what it's about.

So to have faith in this possibility, possibility of this kind of freedom, this kind of absence of these difficult states of mind, these painful states of mind. And then to live in the world based on them. Is this something we have faith in? Is this something we have confidence in? Is this something you want to trust? Is this something that you want to have fidelity to? Do you want to have loyalty to this? Is this something that has such great value that you're going to be committed to it? And not give it up too lightly, too easily. You're not going to come along and finally decide, well, yes, this non-anger thing is good. But now I'm justified to be angry. Greed is good. Non-greed is pretty good. But yeah, but this thing is so good. It's OK for me to have greed for this. Fidelity. Commitment to something that we know, we've discovered for ourselves. A feeling of being clean inside. A feeling of being cleansed of these dirty, these things that soil us, that pressure us, that hurt us. To feel the beauty of it and the relief of it, the goodness of it, the wonderfulness of it. To feel the value of this. This, I'm not going to give this up easily. There are forces inside of me that want to give those up. There's still the forces of anger and greed and envy and all these things can be there. But I've experienced the absence of it. And I'm committed to it. I'm not going to give in easily to these other things. I'm not going to give myself, give myself up for them. I'm not going to lose myself in these things. And how am I going to do that? Not give myself up, not lose myself to them? I'm going to practice. I have faith in this practice. I have faith of practicing. I might not be a good practitioner, but at least I have a practice. At least that's what I'm faithful to, is to practice

and try to stay close to this. This is what's important.

And how do we make it so important that it becomes the most important thing in your life, this thing here? More important than your family, for example? One way is to appreciate that with this as a foundation, this kind of freedom, your love and care for your family would be so much greater. All these things get in the way. So you can safely tell your family, I have something that's more important than you. Because, hopefully you tell it to them the right way. They've understood. Because of it, you actually have so much more love available than you could ever could have had if these states had stayed in you. Isn't that nice? What a nice trade-off. No, no, I want you to be angry and greedy because I want to be the most important person for you. No, no.

So in Buddhism, faith is important. Or confidence or trust. Fidelity is important. Commitment is important. But you're asked to make, to know what that is for yourself. It's some possibility and potential that you have. And I hope that you're inspired by that potential that you have. I hope that it gives you something that you really, a basis upon which to live, a foundation, a common denominator of how we want to live in this world. And if we do it, I propose that it's a revolutionary act to do it. If we want a world that's going to be peaceful, nowadays when there's so much war and horror, horrific war going on, if we want peace to begin with us, peace is going to start with you. If you don't, you're only expecting other people to create world peace. But if it's going to start with you, this kind of teaching is pointing the way.

May each of us be free of covetousness, greed, ill will, anger, resentment, contempt, insolence, envy, avariciousness, deceit, fraud, obstinacy, rivalry, conceit, arrogance, vanity, and here it says negligence. I like to translate that word as carelessness. So you get to make up part of Buddhism for yourself. But if it's Buddhist, there's part that you can't make up. And that's your heart's freedom. May you be free. So thank you very much.

And we have a few minutes before they set up for the tea and a few minutes before the formal ending of the If you would be so kind as to say hello to the people next to you, maybe a couple of the people, so they turn around, make sure no one gets left out. And maybe say something about what this talk was like for you.