

Tuesday Dharma talk

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So to begin by expressing my gratitude for you all being here and your practice. Now two days of practicing. Thank you very much. And so the theme of the retreat is to put side by side the five, what's usually called in English the five faculties with the five hindrances. And these are very distinct, very different, and it's invaluable to understand the difference. And to highlight its importance, they're not even like apples and oranges. It's like gravel and oranges.

And if you try to squeeze the gravel to get orange juice, it's not going to work. You need oranges to get orange juice. And being caught up in these hindrances is a little bit like trying to get something good from something that's not going to provide that. But the faculties are these really healthy, at times healing qualities that are celebrated as being quite important. And I say that because the ancient language, the Pāli language, the word for, that's being translated as faculties, is *indriya*. And faculties is a little bit boring word.

And this is what I call the flattening of Buddhism, translated into English. The word Indra is similar to the word Brahma in *brahmavihāra*, where sometimes in, that's the four divine abodes, loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. And sometimes Brahma here, which refers to this great god Brahma who ruled some corner of the heavens, but people will sometimes render it into English as divine abodes. Brahma is translated into English as divine. You get kind of a nice feeling maybe. So Indra is another one of these great gods in the Indian pantheon.

He's supposed to rule another corner of the heavens. And so in that regard, we could maybe translate them as the divine faculties, the five divinities within. Because the word faculty is not there, it literally means something like of Indra, of the nature of Indra. So the five divinities within. Now we're talking of something a little bit more, you know, colorful than faculties. What's nice about faculties, I think of it as capacities.

They're capacities we have, and we're here to grow them, develop them. And what's interesting about these five divine qualities is that they are states, not practices. So, like faith. Most people don't practice faith. Like you don't go up to somebody, hey do the faith thing. Let's do faith.

Let's pump up the faith and do faith. It's more like, you know, evoke your faith, arouse your faith that you have, live in your faith, live close to it. It's a state. And because I'm doing something deeper within that and some for some people faith is is some people try to translate into English as conviction. And that's okay, perhaps, because it points to its motivational factor of faith. But it doesn't contain the heartfelnness that sometimes the English word has.

I like the word faith because it feels much more heartfelt. It's like, faith is where you put your heart. Faith is what the heart most loves or cares for is important for the heart. There's a warmth, there's an emotional quality to the word faith for me. And so it's more like a state, almost like an emotional state, that has a motivational quality, has a cognitive aspect to it. But it's something much includes all of that.

Samādhi, which we'll talk about in a couple of days maybe, is also translated into English as concentration, and that's also kind of flattens it. Some people hear the word concentrate or concentration, and they think it's supposed to be like a laser focus, and they kind of get all tight and narrow and scrunched up in their mind, and it's really to zap, they're going to zap whatever they're looking at, and get a headache, get frustrated. But *samādhi* is not a narrow practice of focus. *Samādhi* is a state of unification. It's a whole embodied, minded state that it all comes together in this beautiful quality of beingness. A unified state of beingness that may be centered on something, but still is a wonderful, so it's rich, and it also has a lot of emotions.

That can come with a sense of tremendous well-being, tremendous sense of confidence or clarity, tremendous sense of equanimity and peace. And all these things are more like states. And so today, the pairing of these inner divinities with our inner gravel, is to pair mindfulness with the first hindrance, which is usually translated as sensual desire. And so the *sati*, the Pāli word for mindfulness, is also not an activity. Even my mother, when I was growing up, tried to tell me to do it. She said, Gil, as I walked across the kitchen floor with the muddy shoes, be mindful.

Probably the number of times I ignored her is probably a direct correlation to how much I've been doing this as a grown-up. I'm kind of making up for it, for being so mindless as a kid. But it turns out the word *sati*, the way the Buddha teaches it and when he was teaching in his language, it was never something that we do which is a little bit of a surprise given I think for

some people given how it's a to-doing thing here and kind of Western insight Western secular mindfulness. There are things to do and those things can be called mindfulness practice. But mindfulness itself, *sati* itself, is a state, kind of like a state like *samādhi*. You enter into the state of *sati*, a state of clarity, a state of presence, a state of awareness that is not just cognitive, not just thinking.

It's an embodied state of awareness. Where does awareness reside? When I was younger, if someone asked me, where are you aware, I would have pointed to my head. After I'd been practicing mindfulness for a long time, practicing this mindfulness practice for a long time, I would point here to my chest. That's where awareness resides. And then I practice for a while longer, and then if someone asked me where it is, I would go like this with my hands, meaning it's just everywhere.

It's a state, state of being aware where there's no boundaries to the awareness. And if there is a center, it's in the body and the torso. And so it radiates from there, it kind of abides there and comes from there. It's a state. But the practices that we do are the practices that evokes the state. So, for example, with *samādhi*, you might say that focusing on the breath, that evokes *samādhi*.

Being recognizing the breath and feeling the sensations of breath, that evokes *sati*. So there's things to do when we do mindfulness practice, but they're very simple. They're simply knowing, recognizing what's happening as it is happening. And it's simply sensing or feeling the sensations as they're being, as they're occurring. Sometimes there's also seeing, simply seeing without interfering, seeing what's happening. So these are the things we do, know, feel, see.

And as we get into it, it's kind of like we're waking up something. We're waking up our deep, full capacity to be aware. It's a beingness, it's a state of awareness. So these five divinities inside, maybe you appreciate more than being divine, because they're not just simply a narrow, little, tight, little practice of mental noting. It's a real, it's a wonderful, delightful state that we come into. And so I loved Andrea's talk yesterday and talking about the way she evoked faith.

And then we went for a walk afterwards and had a delightful conversation about faith in different ways and different times in our life where something, we experienced something quite profound that maybe gave birth to faith or maybe evoke some kind of special connection to something spiritual, something divine, something. And I was reflecting after that conversation that what it would be like to recount my autobiography only from the point of view of these special experiences I had, spiritual experiences. I didn't know what spiritual was, but

you know, these wonderful spiritual, faith-filled experiences that really in some ways shaped me growing up in ways that I didn't know. So I'll offer you a couple as a way of easing into this topic of mindfulness. And some of these I'd forgotten until I started doing meditation. And then after meditating a while on retreat and stuff, I started having these kind of nice experiences and that were akin similar to what I had as a child in the rare times.

And I said, oh, I know this one. I've forgotten all about that. And they were a ton of touchstones for me. And I'll tell you mostly in the autobiography of these good states, you know, my mites line kind of like grandiose. But I had certainly a challenging life growing up. I moved a lot growing up in different countries.

And I changed schools 12 times in 12 years, all kinds of things. Challenge in different places, some quite difficult. But in terms of the amazing things was, on sunny days, when the sunlight came through the kitchen window, if I took a white bed sheet and put it over the kitchen table, covered it all the way down to the floor, and got underneath the sheets underneath the table, and that light would come in through the sunlight would come in and through the white sheets. I would sit there as a little kid and feel so safe and contented. And there was something like the space inside those sheets was luminous. It was like... The most important thing was the space, the warmth, the goodness of the space, and the feeling in my chest of being like nothing else was needed.

Things were complete. I was complete. It was not a state that needed to be justified or explained or that had any lack in it. They were just like, oh, it was so good to sit there. And I did that a few times and forgot about it until many years later. But that was a nice thing.

And it was not a cognitive experience. I'm sure I thought I had some thoughts about it, but it was something more embodied and full and settled. Like some of my, you know, I'm from Norway, and I think one of the formative experiences of my life is being... Norwegians spend a lot of time on water, and so we would go out to little boats on the fjords. And early in the morning, when things were really still, no wind, and the fjord water was completely still and quiet, these amazing mountains around us. And it was just so peaceful and still and quiet.

And I would sit quietly by myself on the boat. It's like I could, it was like now I was in a state of infinity, infinite time. There was no time. Sitting there in this peaceful setting. And it kind of, that entered me into my, kind of my torso. I think a lot of it, I remember kind of the feeling in my chest that felt so, again, peaceful, contentful, in a way that was not just in my chest.

It was kind of like there was a continuity between this very peaceful, early mornings, seeing on the boat, on the water with the boat gently, gently, ever so gently moving maybe, and

what was happening in my chest since a piece. Or when I was probably 11, 10 or 10, I think I was 10, we were living in Italy and I had to take a school bus. I'd take that school, I'd take the public bus home from school. And I never, as far as I know, there was never a decision. It wasn't like I wanted something consciously. But I figured out that if I sat in the particular seat on the bus, because I was one of the last people to get off the end of the line, that if I sat there, the conductor would sit right in front of me.

And the conductor was the person who sold the tickets, and someone else was the bus driver. Right. And so he would sit down and he had this tally book and he'd write down how many tickets he'd sold on this last round. How many round trip, how many singles, how many kids, you know, whatever he had. He had all these categories. And so he had these little boxes and lines and ledger. It was a ledger. And he had a pencil and I'd look over his shoulder.

And as I was watching him do his work... I just felt so good. And I just, you know, and it never occurred to me like, it wasn't like planning it or wanting it. It's just, I just, something in me when you, that's where you sit. And I never, I have no memory of when it ended. And I think I moved, changed schools again while I was in Italy. So maybe I stopped doing that bus ride or something. It never occurred to me I missed it or anything, but I remember.

And I think now that I've been practicing some time, I think that I got concentrated. There was something about his concentration on his work and what was going on, the fine-pointedness of it, that something got gathered. I got kind of absorbed in what was going on. I got concentrated. And there was a state again, a state that was from the neck down. A state that was kind of a sense of fullness or goodness or wholeness that was so nice.

So I can go on and on, not on and on. I have a few more, but that's probably enough. And because what I wanted, the reason I wanted to tell you this is that these were embodied states. These are states that were kind of from the neck down for the most part. If it involved the neck up, it was because it included everything else too. It was just everything included.

And so as I came into practicing mindfulness, the knowing and feeling and seeing, over time, I felt my awareness, as I said, was more in my torso than in my head. My head, my mind, my cognitive capacity had a role, but that was just a small piece of it. It wasn't that important. There was a state of being aware that, for me, was a kind of... rather than my mind becoming opened and my body became open. So sometimes I've called it open bodyfulness. And I think it's unfortunate that in English we called *sati* mindfulness. Poor mind to be so full.

But bodyful, I kind of prefer, we should be translated as bodyfulness. Because embodiedness, being in the body, connected to the body, is such a huge part of this cultivating and growing

and expanding awareness. And our body is a field of nerves, neurons, that are spreading out all over the body's network of nerves, that are there to pick up data coming in. If it's warm, the nerves that feel warm. The cold, nerves that feel cold. Pain, discomfort, pressure, physical contact. This goes on and on. We have an amazing array of different nerves that are always operating.

And some are in the stomach, some are in different parts, some are all over, that are taking in, sensing things. So in a sense, these are the apparatus, the means for knowing our environment, knowing our inner environment, our outer environment. So much of it is below the neck. And so to be aware is the gestalt, is the gathering together of the harmonious working of all these faculties for attention that we have. And so for me, at some point it feels like it's a state of being aware. It's not a willful doing of awareness.

The motivated doing is to remember to know, to recognize, remember to sense and feel, remember to see here in the present moment what is here. And so as a state, what we're also then happening is that it becomes something that begins to suffuse us, to fill us with goodness. Fills us with a kind of feeling of being peaceful, content, settled, feeling like we're good enough, just the way we are. Imagine that. You can just be yourself and it turns out it's a nice thing after all. Isn't that good?

And... And so just being alive is enough because all that we need to feel at peace, to feel contented, to feel love, to feel divine, that divine sense of beingness that needs no explanation, needs no justification. And it's all there in that peace. So that's nice. Sensual desire on the other hand, it has the allure and the promise of something great, sometimes. And sometimes it comes with strong feelings of pleasure, means a really good fantasy.

Sensual fantasy can be quite enjoyable. But it can also leave us feeling bereft afterwards or feeling impoverished. It's not a kind of joy or well-being that generally fills us with this inner sense of goodness. And sometimes we confuse pleasure with happiness, confuse pleasure with divine feeling of joy and goodness and wholeness. And so we come to these hindrances. The first one, as I said, is sensual pleasure, sensual desire.

And it might be helpful to think of the hindrances as strategies. When we're challenged, sometimes there are strategies that we have in relationship to the challenge. One is to avoid it by going after sensual pleasure. You know, I mean, there's not a few people who will choose chocolate as a means. Alcohol, drugs, all kinds of things in order to avoid their discomfort that they're feeling. And avoid the difficult emotions, difficult relationships they're in. Don't want to deal with it, so I'll just get drunk. We get along fine if we're tipsy, so that's the way to go.

And our ill will, the strategy of something uncomfortable and difficult is to find someone to blame, someone to be who's at fault, and some people are real experts at kind of blaming everybody else for something. Sometimes when things are challenging, we shut down. We get sleepy. We freeze. We get lethargic. And sometimes the strategy when things are difficult is to run around like we're a chicken rather than a head. Just run around and not know what to do and just kind of be agitated. And sometimes it's part of the strategy is maybe to look like you're trying to deal with it.

Then there's doubt, uncertainty. Sometimes doubt and uncertainty, indecisiveness is a way of escaping, not taking responsibility, not engaging, not being honest, and then falling back, I don't know, I don't know what to do, I'm not sure. So it can be a strategy of avoidance, strategy of kind of coping. Sometimes the hindrances, forms of compensation, that we're compensating for some feeling of lack. And that's particularly true with sensual desire. We have this wonderful word in English, expression in English, that something is wanting.

You know, the food is wanting salt, meaning it's lacking salt. And so sometimes from a sense of lack, a sense of inner emptiness, a sense of inner lack of meaning and purpose, lack of feeling, not feeling like we don't belong. There's a lack. Sometimes there's a lack is that, you know, that we don't feel that we're... Yeah, so then there's this lack, and so then we try to fill it with some ways. And so sensual desire is a way to fill that hole, you know, to feel kind of depressed, so we go through the refrigerator and stuff ourselves.

Or we feel some kind of lack, and maybe we feel kind of weak and powerless. And one way to feel power is to be angry. There can be a lot of power when you're angry. And some people having a good thing to be angry about makes them feel like they're alive, gives them purpose. Their life now is meaning. You know, how could they here at IRC have browns, albus? I'm not looking like, I'm right, I'm righteous, I'm powerful, I have a strong opinion, I know who I am, I'm taking up the good cause. God, they should have been striped white and brown. And then I know. So now I'm angry with the color choice. I mean, I'm using a silly example, but it's a compensation for not feeling maybe powerless.

So you can go through each of these and see them as a compensation. Or it could be that it's partly as compensation as well, but also it's a way of... building oneself up. There's a kind of a conceit involved. Some really good sensual fantasies, their function is to show us that we're wonderful, kind of gratification. It's fantasies of gratification. You know, maybe we have fantasies of, I don't know, fantasies of building chains of hospital, chain of hospitals so we can get free medical care to everybody who needs it and it'll be great and I'll get a wonderful awards and be praised and be written up in the newspapers and I'll just do this

wonderful thing. So this fantasy of being wonderfully incapable that some people fall into.

And the allure, the pull of that debate to getting involved is we want to feel good about ourselves. We want to feel like we have a role and a purpose. We want to feel like we are appreciated or something. And sometimes there can be a lot of conceit around needing to do that. And so there can be fantasies that reinforce a conceit of who we are. There can be fantasies of anger and hostility about that, again, justify who I am, because I'm the one who's right.

It's very easy to find out what's wrong and be critical of others. When I was in graduate school, one of the surprises of graduate school was the medium for... the currency of academia was to critique someone. And it was phenomenal, just everyone was criticizing something all the time. It was rare. It was rare, they said something like that was really good. It was like that. No, he missed. He didn't put a period where it should have been a period. Or, you know, even something so petty, but, you know, didn't follow his sources to the, you know. And it was a remarkable that this is all about criticism. And it was safer. It's easier to look like you're smart if you're criticizing. It's more difficult to look like you're smart and capable if you're saying someone else is smart and did really well.

So these have in common kind of compensation, avoidance, conceit that come into play with the hindrances is that they involve some kind of story. There's a story. Look at me. Sensual desire fantasies that usually are a story. Now that Gill has mentioned chocolate, how could he? It's ruined my day now. But I will, I bet there's some way to kind of slip out when no one's noticing and go to Safeway and get some chocolate and how are we going to do that? And you can't stop thinking about chocolate because I meant... And then you get angry with me and then now you're caught up in anger. You're going to write to the people who run IRC and say, this Dharma teacher should not mention chocolate. This was really wrong and you can't stop writing a letter. By the time you finally sit down at the end of the retreat, it's a ten-page long letter justifying all the reasons why you know, it's wrong that I mentioned chocolate on retreats, ruining people's practice. I apologize. But it's a story and a narrative that's going on and on.

And behind it, supporting it might be biological drives, might be all kinds of things deeper. But with the hindrances, it's really helpful... to see how much the stories that we tell ourselves are fueling it. And some people who try to let go of a hindrance, and they kind of think they're letting go of some deeper motivational drive, but they keep the stories going. And so they're right there to stir things up again. But if you can recognize a story, oh, that's a story, that's a fantasy. Maybe then it's a little bit easier to back off, loosen up.

So sensual desire, desires for chocolate, desires for sex, desires for good food, for pleasures

of all kinds. Why are you doing it? Is it a compensation? Is it so you can avoid something? Is it so you can create the wonderful sense of self through it? And so you're enamored not so much with that pleasure, but somehow the sense of self that is successfully getting something. What is the story? And if you can recognize, part of what we do with these hindrances is not condemn them, not hate them, not try to attack them. But there's this wonderful art of turning the attention.

So say it this way, usually when we're involved in a hindrance, there's an object to the story, an object to what we want or what we don't want or what's happening. And we're a little bit caught in the subject of attention, the subject of our narrative. And the idea is to turn the attention around 180 degrees and look at ourselves desiring. See it as a story, if there's a story, and then start feeling. What are the sensations of desire? What's the physicality of desiring? Rather than having desire, be the fuel for more stories, you turn around and look the other direction to the source. What's really happening here? What are the sensations? What are the feelings? What's happening in the mind?

So that you're taking charge in a sense. You're not allowing the desires to be in charge of you, but you're turning around and... taking a nice stand, comfortable, relaxed, and saying, I see you. Desire, look at you. I see you. And I'm not going along. But I will be aware. I'll be present, I'll know you, I'll feel you, I'll see what's happening. And in doing that, you're beginning to evoke a very different presence. Now you're squeezing to get juice. Now you're kind of allowing making room inside of you, for something to begin to wake up, something to have room for presence, a room for awareness to grow, awareness for this kind of inner sense of aliveness, that vitality that can come from really being rooted and centered here in our body, in the moment, here being aware.

If we're caught up in sensual desire, there's very little room for anything deeper to grow and flow and unfold. And that's one of the problems with these hindrances. Our world gets very narrow, gets very small, because we're caught up in the hindrance, caught in the desires, caught in the aversions, caught in the resistance shutting down of sloth and torpor, caught in the restlessness, the regrets, caught in the doubts. And the way to not be caught doesn't have to be getting rid of the hindrance, but getting rid of the hindering quality of it. So say it a little more clearly. The point isn't to get rid of sensual desire, but to overcome how sensual desire hinders us, limits us, hides what's really happening.

So this turning around 180 degrees, oh, I see you. Oh, this is sensual desire that's getting in the way for me to see clearly. This is sensual desire where I'm trying to make orange juice from gravel. This is not really what I'm here to do. This is not really going to bring awakening.

It's not going to bring freedom. It's not going to bring the divine. That's not going to come out of being caught this way and fixated this way and preoccupied this way. We're awakening the *indriyas*. *Indriya*, here's that Pāli word, of Indra, of the god Indra. We're awakening something very special inside of us, within us, that maybe, that is, some people, if they're comfortable with this kind of language, might call it divine.

And it turns out that there's this lucid, luminous, odd, wide, open experience of being aware, of a quality of very settled, rooted presence. A presence which is saturated with attention. It's here to feel and sense and know what's happening. And so to be rooted here. And when we're not, the hindrance is one of the primary ways we lose our rootedness. We lose our presence, the full 360 degree presence. And how do we come back to it? It's to really know when a hindrance is here, to know. To know it nicely. I see you, sensual desire. Yeah, I'm up to your ways. I understand. I understand it's difficult. I understand that you're trying to avoid something. Life is hard. But there's another way. Let's not do the gravel way. Oh, I know that you're compensating for something. And I'll care for it and hold the underlying suffering with compassion and care. Not a little bit of conceit than being caught up in being someone special. Or caught up in being someone who's the opposite of someone special. Some people are caught up in negative self-images. Either way, it's probably something that needs a lot of love and compassion, care.

So the hindrances are not enemies. The hindrances are not something to reject. But it is something to stop for and turn around 180 degrees and look at it, see it for what it is, become wise about them. Begin recognizing what's really happening when you have hindrance. Recognize a story. Some people, when they simply see the story of the hindrance, that's enough for it to stop. It no longer grabs, holds them. Some people need something deeper because the reason the hindrance is there is there something deeper inside that needs our love, that needs our care, that needs attention, that needs a sense of someone who's going to provide a sense of safety and goodness? And that is you. That's the function of attention. Knowing, feeling, seeing is to know so what's known feels safe, to sense so what is sensed feels safe. Safe from what? Safe from you.

So, the final thing I'll say about it's relevant for all the faculties, but especially in this one of mindfulness *sati*, a big part of the art of awareness is not doing it, but recognizing it. There's many ways in which you can be aware without being the person who's aware, who's doing the awareness. There's a way in which you can't stop being aware. If you're listening to me maybe, but if you're listening well enough to know what I'm saying, I just say cut it out. Just stop being aware. What are you going to do? How do you get away from it? Well, maybe the

hindrances are in one way. But you know, you can't really stop being aware and be awake at the same time. It's a natural, easy, relaxed functioning. So a big part of awareness is to recognize your being aware, not strain and puff and puff and recognize it, center yourself in it, appreciate it.

And if at some point it grows and develops into something, it begins resembling a state. Maybe you can start recognizing the goodness of it, the warmth of it, the divin- the divine-ness of it, the sweetness of it, the wholeness of it, contentedness of it. There's something about the state of being aware that's some point, it might be far down the line. Just being aware feels like it's enough. Nothing has to change. Just being aware is all that has to happen here and now. So maybe we'll conclude this talk for you to sense, feel, and recognize how just being here is enough to access being aware. There is an awareness that's here for you. Can you recognize it if we sit here? The only thing required of you is to recognize it, not to do it.