

Intro to Mindfulness Pt 2 (6) Five Faculties: Confidence

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Hello and welcome to this new five-part series on the Five Faculties. I want to point out that when I talked about the hindrances last week, I talked about how the hindrances, especially the last three, interfere with our ability to practice. They inhibit action. The first two hindrances, desire and ill will, might propel the wrong kind of action. When we act on greedy desire and hostile ill will, the results are not good.

With the five faculties, it's the opposite. The first two – faith and effort – involve action, activity, and engagement. The last three – mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom – support action. The Buddha was said to be a teacher of action. He was a *kammavāda?*, an actionist, maybe.

In the meditation traditions of Buddhism, Buddhism isn't often associated with action, because in meditation we sit still, we're quiet. In the West, people have such busy, spinning minds, that are striving, pushing, or trying to do so much, that a lot of the teachings are about not doing anything, relaxing, settling, just being – don't do, just be. However, I don't think the Buddha ever really said, "Just be." He was a teacher of action – engaging and being active in the world.

There are three kinds of activity: in body, speech, and mind. They're all activity; nothing is static. Even the deep immersion in the present moment, where deep stillness and peace can happen, is a kind of activity. It's a way of being active, a way of doing that brings deep peace.

We might expend a tremendous amount of physical energy in some activities. But in doing that, we come into harmony, and the mind becomes still. Inner stillness and quiet take over so that when we stop the activity, we feel peaceful and calm, maybe concentrated. So activity and being calm, peaceful, centered, quiet, and still in an inner way are not opposed to each other.

The first of the Five Faculties is usually translated into English as "faith." Many people might associate faith with Western religious ideas of faith – having faith in a tenet, having faith in something outside of us, having faith in the purpose or meaning of life, or in what's most sacred.

When the Buddha used the word "*saddhā*," it was explicitly a kind of mental state or activity that had some kind of desire as part of it. This is why it's associated with the first hindrance and is kind of parallel to it.

The first hindrance is sensual desire or avariciousness (wanting to have things). Faith (*saddhā*) is also a desire. It's considered to be a wholesome desire. It's a desire for us to engage in the path of practice, to be interested in and motivated to work for the end of our suffering. "This is what I want to do – to end my suffering, to become free."

So *saddhā* is not faith in a doctrine but the belief or confidence that there's something to do, and we want to do it. We want to practice, we want to meditate, we want to live by the Precepts, and we want to live by the Eightfold Path. Yes, we want to meditate. There's a big "yes" behind this so-called faith or confidence that is the first of the faculties.

Calling *saddhā* “confidence” has an association with being confident we can do something, take care of ourselves, or engage in activity. But what might be missing in confidence is a kind of heartfulness that’s in *saddhā*. This is the affective quality of faith, where faith can be an inspiring heart quality. In Buddhism, the word “*saddhā*” might be a combination of the English meanings of faith and confidence.

I think it’s helpful to appreciate that the Dharma path that we’re on calls on us to act. This applies to meditating. Meditation doesn’t work unless you do it. So we’re called on to show up to meditate, maybe every day. A lot of the benefits of meditation come from doing it regularly. Even if you think meditation is mostly just sitting and letting go very, very deeply so you can be here without the normal tensions of daily life, it is still the activity of getting to your seat and sitting down to do it.

But we can see meditation as a delightful, healthy, calming action as well. The metaphor that I gave for the last meditation was that of rowing a boat on the ocean. We’re always on the ocean when we’re rowing on the ocean. But with every stroke of the oars, we’re moving forward in the water. We are always arriving in the ocean, but always moving through it. Always immersing ourselves in the ocean. We’re both coming and going forward into the ocean.

Here, we’re immersing ourselves in the present moment. But it’s not a static event. There’s a momentum on the path, of moving forward into it more fully. The cyclic movement of breathing in and breathing out might be the oars. You can figure out for yourself whether the in-breath or the out-breath is the stroke, and the out-breath or the in-breath is the lifting of the oars out of the water. Different people might have different associations.

This momentum is not meant to be a strain where you’re looking into the future for something else. You’re just looking to be really right here, in the ocean of the Dharma, the ocean of the present moment. There’s a forward movement. That moving forward in the practice doesn’t mean that you’re going someplace. But you’re moving forward into being more immersed here, in yourself, in this moment. There’s a dropping away. The water that rushes back off the hull of the boat is all your thoughts and preoccupations. They just wash away so we can just be here in this moment with ourselves in a full way.

Have faith and confidence that it’s invaluable to be on this Dharma path and engage in all the pieces of the path that we understand. Have faith that there *is* a possibility of freedom from our hatred, our greed, our addictions, and our resentments and envies. It *is* possible to be free of our anxiety and our negative self-talk. It *is* possible to free ourselves from these things so that the beautiful parts of ourselves – goodwill and compassion, kindness, peace, and our ethical sensitivity – can guide us to do well in this life and not cause any harm. Have faith that we *can* find a way to live a harmless life and not cause any intentional harm. The world needs people like that.

So we can be inspired and feel, “Yes, I have faith in the activity, the path, the action, the engagement.” This is a path of action the Buddha gave. However, we have to be very careful that it’s not action where we’re straining or tensing. It’s not a competition. It’s not a race to get someplace.

We have to find a way to engage in this path (in meditation, in the Eightfold Path, whatever it is that you understand the Dharma to be) so that the way you act is nourishing and feels good – of course you want to do it. This is a good way to do it. That’s the art. Not only did the Buddha teach action in terms of having to act, but he also taught the importance of *how* you act, and how you engage. But there has to be faith, confidence, trust, or inspiration: “Yes, this is what I want to do.”

For the Buddha, the primary purpose of *saddhā* was to begin and continue doing the practice. Since that’s what we’re here for – to practice together – may your inspiration, your confidence, your trust, and your faith in the possibility of being on a path to freedom be a wonderful fuel and motivator. Maybe faith doesn’t only motivate you to meditate. Maybe there’s a “Yes” to a way of living that lets the Dharma of harmlessness, the Dharma path of freedom, propel you into greater awareness and greater showing up here and now for this life and for each person you encounter, for every activity you do, and every way in which you regard yourself. May all those be of benefit to yourself and the world. May you have faith in that possibility. The next four days are on the faculty of faith, the faculty of mindfulness, the faculty of *samādhi*, and the faculty of wisdom. Thank you.