

Intro to Mindfulness Pt 2 (7) Faculty of Courageous Effort

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Welcome. This is the second talk on the Five Faculties. But when we translate the Pali word "*indriya*" as "faculties," we are kind of diminishing the power and strength of the word "*indriya*." Calling them "faculties" makes them seem like just a potential we have (if we have a faculty, we could use it).

The Pali word means "of Indra." In the time of the Buddha, Indra was the head god of the pantheon of gods. In ancient Greece, we might compare this to the qualities of Zeus, or in Norway, to the qualities of Odin. The *indriya* are qualities that can take charge, can really guide and help us to take control of our life. In American Buddhism, controlling ourselves is often seen as inappropriate, but it's very appropriate to show up and take charge of our practice in a certain way. We have these faculties, these capacities that really infuse, enliven, and give strength to the practices we do.

There's nothing wrong with calling upon a capacity for inner strength and power and doing Buddhist practice strongly. The five *indriya* give us strength and power that can support us to live without hate, greed, conceit, asserting ourselves, or wanting to dominate other people or be aggressive. This is a power that also keeps us from being weak, succumbing, collapsing, or running away.

So "*indriya*" is a powerful word, as is the word that's usually translated as "effort" – the second faculty, *virīya*. *Virīya* also is a powerful word. Calling it "effort" domesticates it in some way or tamps it down, making it too ordinary. "Effort" doesn't really carry the strength and power *virīya* has in the Indian context.

In ancient India and Tibet, this word is sometimes associated with being heroic: heroic effort. Today I am calling it "courageous effort." When I began teaching Buddhism, chances are I would have been criticized as a man using words like "courage" and "heroism" because they seemed too masculine.

Certainly, there can be huge problems with those words. But heroism is also a gift. A certain degree of heroic effort is a necessary part of life so we don't give in to our own personal tendencies to be weak, complacent, or acquiesce to our attachments, our clinging, and our aversions. We need courage to not give in to the five hindrances.

Virīya, translated as heroic effort, is the corollary to the second hindrance, which is ill-will, hostility, and aversion. The connection or bridge between the two and the reason they're associated is that ill-will has energy and power in it. Anger has tremendous power that bubbles up. Sometimes the way that anger moves through us can feel volcanic. But if anger has ill-will with it, it takes a heroic effort to not give in to that volcano in a way that causes harm.

The heroic effort to avoid any causing of harm is at the heart of what this heroic, courageous effort is in Buddhism – not to cause any harm whatsoever to oneself or others. With the energy of anger, the idea is to channel that energy. Don't give up the energy of anger unless it's just over the top. The energy, engagement, and vitality that are there are part of the reason some people like their anger. Anger makes them feel alive. But we can take that sense of alive energy and let go of the hostility but keep the energy of anger. Then it's available for heroic effort.

The energy of anger without hostility is powerful, as in, "Yes. Let's not yell at anyone. Let's show up, let's be present without being hostile with our body, our speech, or our mind." We also do this for ourselves. We don't

have any hostility toward ourselves. We don't succumb to the forces inside that debilitate us, deprive us, and harm us.

Having faith or confidence, the first of the Five Faculties, sets us on the course of practice. We know something about practice – “This is what I want to do. This is important.” The second faculty, heroic effort, is like – be serious. “This is what I'm going to do.” With faith, there's no doubt. With faith, there's clarity and confidence – “Yes, I want to do this.” This doesn't mean that we are in a hurry, or that we strain, or that we put ourselves in a situation where we'll be discouraged when we're not making progress. This is an embodied way of saying, “Yes, I can give myself to these values, this way of living, this approach to life: I'm going to avoid causing any harm.” Then we do that heroically with courage.

Sometimes the forces of distraction that we're practicing with in meditation are themselves a form of running away, seeking comfort, or avoiding what's really happening here for us. It's kind of harmful to do that – to avoid and not show up honestly for ourselves. Sometimes meditation practice is sitting in the fire – showing up for what's very difficult for us, and learning how to metaphorically stay still, take our seat, be in the middle of it, and not be overcome. We find some inner strength, stillness, and an inner capacity to stay with what is very difficult rather than getting distracted.

If things become quite peaceful and wonderful in meditation, and it seems like that kind of heroic effort is too much, probably that's true. Maybe effortful heroic effort is no longer needed. But maybe it's still heroic. I've had experiences in meditation where I became very, very peaceful. But coming out of meditation, I had to have courage and a lot of confidence and faith that it was okay to stay peaceful when all the people around me were insisting that I should join them in their anger, in condemning others, in gossiping, in greed, and in behavior that was not harmonious with this deep, settled feeling of peace. In this situation, it can be kind of heroic to say, “This is where I'm going to maintain this peaceful inner life and be present for what's happening here, but I'm not going to succumb, I'm not going to give in, I'm not going to give it up.”

Faith or confidence is what begins the practice. We have confidence this is the way forward. Even if we're experimenting and we're unsure where the Dharma practice goes but we are willing to give it a try, that's an indication of some degree of confidence. What follows is, if you're going to do it, do it with some commitment, strength, and courage. This doesn't mean anything that causes you to be tense. This is the courage to not be tense – the courage to engage in a peaceful way. This is the courage to be non-harming but show up with embodied energy, embodied vitality, to take our place.

The Buddha took his place the night of his awakening. In the classic statue behind me of the Buddha on the night of his enlightenment, he is touching the very ground upon which he is sitting. In a sense, he is asserting, “This is my place.” He refused to give in to the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion that assailed him on the night of his awakening. He stayed upright, still, courageous, unwilling to give in to them, unwilling to collapse, unwilling to run away. He sat there, really present, here and now.

I hope that this talk on courageous effort has hit the right spot and that it encourages you. The word “encouraged” has the word “courage” in it. I hope this encourages you to have some courage and some strength. I hope you can give yourself – not necessarily to the practice in terms of what you *do* – but rather, the courage of how you are. Be courageous in how you practice. Practice in a way that helps you to take refuge in your capacity to be peaceful, at peace, and an emissary of peace in this world. Thank you very much. Tomorrow we'll do the faculty of mindfulness (sati).