

# *Saddhā* (2 of 5): Confidence

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on March 17, 2020

I am going to continue with this series of short talks on faith, based on five aspects of the Pali word *saddhā*. One aspect of this word is translated into English as ‘faith’ – this is the most common translation. Yesterday I talked about the quality of faith, and today I am going to talk about confidence.

Faith is something important and that has value – faith supports and guides us. For Buddhists, it’s faith in the practice, and this helps make us feel safe in this world and to find freedom. Having faith that the practice does that becomes increasingly challenging when our life, our world, becomes more uncertain.

It’s useful to remember the way the Buddha’s own quest for enlightenment began. He went off to search for enlightenment in order to address the fundamental human conditions of sickness, old age, and death. What he discovered was an answer to those concerns. Then for many years, he taught a practice that was not simply one of coping, stress-reduction, or having pleasant experiences in daily life. The practice was originally designed to deal with the fundamental, existential issues and challenges that we humans have.

To be up against those challenges in a big way – death, sickness, old age – can be quite a ferocious challenge. To have the motivation and strength to do the practice in the face of these challenges sometimes takes a lot of faith. It takes conviction that, “Yes, this is possible.”

The degree of faith called upon varies greatly depending on the circumstances of our life. Someone whose life is going relatively well might say, “I don’t need any faith.” But for someone facing huge challenges, it’s not often so clear what helps, what the path is. Even the Buddhist path can be questioned: “Really, it works for this as well?” To tap into a deep faith, conviction, and trust in this path of practice is sometimes necessary so that we can give ourselves over to the practice. We trust the practice enough to place ourselves solidly on the path of practice – rather than on the path of collapse or fear. At first, faith or belief in the practice – as a way to go forward – may be untested.

The second aspect of *saddhā* is confidence. To sit and walk the path with confidence is part of the *saddhā* that supports us. Confidence is different from faith. We can have faith that something is important and useful, but that faith can be at a distance. It’s like we have a treasure and know that we have the treasure, but we don’t actually use the treasure. The confidence of *saddhā* is what gives us strength to actually engage in the practice. We have confidence that it is worthwhile. The greater our challenges, the more useful it is to tap into our confidence.

Or, if we don’t have enough confidence in ourselves, sometimes it’s useful to borrow confidence from other people. That is one reason why it’s so useful to meditate together with others, or to have dharma friends. In being around friends or teachers who may practice more than you, you can be inspired to borrow – or to be infused or inspired by – their confidence. Confidence, and faith to some degree, is contagious. It isn’t just viruses that are contagious. Lots of good qualities can be caught from other people also. Our inner life can resonate with other people’s confidence, goodness, dedication, and faith.

Sometimes if we don’t have enough confidence ourselves, it can be useful to tap into it through other people. We do this for the purpose of testing, engaging in, and doing the work of the practice, so that we can find out for ourselves that this works.

Certainly, it is important to have confidence in the practice. And it’s useful to have confidence in one’s self – to have enough confidence to say, “Yes, I can do this.” I say “enough confidence” carefully. Enough is enough. Just enough to be able to do it. It doesn’t have to be heroic – just enough to get us to the next sitting, to engage in the next breath, to show up for this breath, or this moment of mindfulness. Just enough to have some continuity of practice through the sitting, through the days. Then slowly it can build and build. You don’t start a marathon by sprinting; you start a marathon just enough to be able to keep going and going.

Having just enough confidence to go along with practice and dedicate yourself to it is enough. It’s helpful to have confidence in one’s self. Also, sometimes it is helpful to practice with others, because other people can have

confidence in you. As I said yesterday, “Other people can believe in you.” To feel that other people believe in you, and that you can do it can be invaluable when the challenges are large: “Yes, you can do it. I value you. I appreciate you. I believe in you. I know you can do it.”

One reason to meditate together, even if it’s online, is – I hope – that there is a mutual spirit of, “I believe in you.” We value the people we are meditating with. We notice them enough that our hearts sing, appreciate and value them. “Yes, you can do it.” Maybe better or richer is: “Yes, we can do it.” It isn’t just the individual; rather, we are doing it together and supporting each other. Confidence in practicing. Confidence in oneself.

There’s also confidence in the goal of practice. There is a goal to this Buddhist practice. Some people call it a goalless goal, because it’s not so much an attainment of something, as it is the shedding of all the obstructions, limitations and ways in which we cling and get attached, so that – without those attachments – we can discover an unshakable peace. We can experience for ourselves what it’s like to feel at home, happy, contented, and profoundly at peace. To just be here.

I like the idea of just being here, content with this moment – not the contentment that makes us lethargic or complacent. Rather, it is the contentment that keeps us open and available for whatever needs to happen in the next moment. We’re confident that we can meet whatever comes our way.

For me, it’s the mindfulness practice I learned through Buddhism that has given me unshakable confidence that I can be mindful, that I can find my way. If I can be mindful, I can be safe. If I can be mindful, I can find the appropriate way to engage in and respond to whatever comes my way.

I hope that this response is one that contributes to the happiness and well-being of everyone, especially during this time when so many people feel challenged by the dangers of the virus.

Thank you very much for our shared practice together this morning, all two hundred of us. It’s immensely valuable that we can have this experience together.

Tomorrow morning we will sit, and then I will talk about the next part of *saddhā*, which is conviction.

May you all be well and take good care of yourself.