

The Spiritual Faculties

Ajahn Nyanadhammo

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A *Dhamma* theme which is very close to my heart is the five *indriya* – the Five Spiritual Faculties. These Five Spiritual Faculties are the qualities of practice, the qualities of mind that one needs to bring to the spiritual path. There's *saddha*, which is faith; *viriya*, energy; *sati*, mindfulness; *samadhi*, which is calm concentration; and *panna*, wisdom. They become powers of mind through which the mind becomes very dynamic and can end suffering.

Saddha is often translated as faith, confidence or conviction. The *Buddha* said that faith comes from having seen that the human condition is unsatisfactory. It is imperfect, wrought with dissatisfaction, discontentment, pain, grief, fear, and anxiety. Having seen that, then the mind naturally seeks a path out of that state. It questions the meaning of life and how to find inner happiness.

So this faith looks for a path out of suffering. For people who come across the *Buddh's* words, to hear that there is a cause for unsatisfactoriness and that there is the ending of unsatisfactoriness and a path to practise for that release: that brings this faith. It's often because we haven't understood *dukkha* – or because we think that *dukkha* shouldn't occur – that we don't leap forth to find a way out.

Recently a lady came to speak with me explaining that a friend of hers had just given birth to a child, and the child had died. She was very upset because she was going to be the godmother, and she said, "This shouldn't happen, this is unfair." So there is the presumption that life should be fair. But with experience, we start to see and understand that life isn't always fair. So *dukkha* is the unfairness of existence. It is not a fair abiding.

So, having seen *dukkha*, we seek a way out. In the case of that lady: having experienced suffering, she came to the monastery and decided that she would practise *Dhamma* and share the merits of her practice with that deceased child. She began seeking a way of dealing with suffering.

When the *Buddha* described faith he talked about faith in four aspects: faith in the *Buddha*, the person who has become fully enlightened in this world and teaches a path out of *dukkha*, and in the *Dhamma*, those teachings of the *Buddha*; and in the *Sangha* those monks, nuns and lay–people who have realised that truth in their own lives; and in the Training. This last one means having faith that this practice we're doing will yield results. Faith in the training also intrinsically implies faith in our own abilities to realise truth: faith that we can do it.

The lack of conviction in our own ability to do the practice is a common obstacle, so one of the responsibilities of a teacher is to encourage and uplift people. This was one of the things that Ajahn Chah often did. I remember one time having a few difficulties and going to him. He was chatting, and he turned to me and said, "Tan Nyanadhammo, you've got very few defilements." That was at a time when it seemed like my mind was full of defilements! But just those few words gave encouragement. There was another occasion when I was newly ordained. The food in Ajahn Chah's monastery was extremely basic: sticky rice, leaves, curries – which were all put in one pot together – and a few bananas, and that was it. As there was very little, some of the monks would get up to serve out the food. You sat with your bowl in front of you and they put the

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food in your bowl: you didn't have a choice, you could only say what you didn't want. One of the Western monks was asked to get up and hand out the food, but he refused, because if he got up then he couldn't watch his bowl and thereby prevent the Thai monks from putting things in it that would upset his stomach. And because of that they asked me to get up in his place.

A couple of days later we went on the same alms-round together into the village, and, as we were coming back to the dining-hall, this monk started complaining about the monks who hand out the food. Self-righteous anger came up in me, and I said to him, "Instead of complaining about the other monks, why don't you get up and help us?" And then I stormed off in a huff.

As I was walking, I heard Ajahn Chah's voice saying, "Good morning" in English. (The only words he knew in English were 'Good morning' and 'Cup of tea.') I turned to see him standing only three feet away with a big radiant smile on his face. And I said, "Oh, good morning, Luang Por." And he radiated loving kindness to me, and the aversion completely disappeared and I was really happy.

That evening I decided, "As Ajahn Chah was very friendly to me, I'll go over and offer him a foot massage": that was a way to do some service for him, and often he would teach *Dhamma* at that time. So he was sitting on a cane seat with me sitting on the floor and massaging his foot when the bell rang for evening chanting. He told the other monks to go to the chanting and I was left together with Ajahn Chah; it was a beautiful cool evening, with the moon coming out full, and the sound of some seventy monks chanting – it was just wonderful. Ajahn Chah sat in meditation as I was massaging his foot – and my mind was on cloud nine, uplifted with joy.

At that point Ajahn Chah kicked me in the chest and knocked me flat on my back! I looked up in shock, and Ajahn Chah pointed at me saying, "See? In the morning someone says something you don't like and you're upset. Then someone else just says, 'Good morning' and you're uplifted all day. Don't get caught up in moods and emotions of like and dislike at what other people say."

Then he gave me a *Dhamma* talk, and I raised my hands in *anjali* and listened to this *Dhamma*. I remember it to this day, and it always brings a sense of how much compassion he had: he saw a person was walking past with his head steaming; he said, "Good morning", and then he waited until the opportunity arose. Out of seventy monks in the monastery, and all the nuns, he thought, "Today I'll teach this person. This one's really stubborn, I'm going to have to give him a kick! He won't remember it if I don't do it tough." What has stayed with me is a sense of faith that the teacher is concerned, is motivated by compassion, and motivated to release you from suffering. And that confidence, that earnestness of mind, brings up the quality of energy, *viriya*, which is the next aspect of the spiritual path.

The *Buddha* defined *viriya*, as application to four things. The first is: if an unwholesome state of mind arises, one recognises it first and then one strives to overcome it. For example, if anger arises, one recognises, "I am angry" and then one strives to overcome that anger. The next aspect is if an unwholesome state of mind hasn't yet arisen then one strives to make sure it doesn't arise. It's a preventative. And in that example of anger, it's often the case that we need to develop loving-kindness (which is the antidote to anger) before it arises. It is very difficult to spread loving-kindness when we are already angry, isn't it? So the preventative is very important. You'll find that if you develop loving-kindness when the mind is at ease then that allows the mind to develop strength and prevent anger from arising.

If the mind gains strength, and develops this quality of preventing unwholesome states to arise, that leads on to the next aspect of Right Effort, which is encouraging wholesome states which haven't yet arisen to arise. One puts forth effort to purposely arouse a thought of loving-kindness in the mind. If one's not thinking a thought of compassion, one intentionally arouses a thought of compassion in the mind. If one's not thinking a thought of renunciation or letting go, one purposely arouses that in the mind. And when these qualities have

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arisen the final aspect is to sustain them: make much of thoughts of loving-kindness, compassion or renunciation; rejoice in them, make them great, infinite, immeasurable. Those qualities then become very strong. This is the effort of the mind, the earnestness to create wholesome qualities, to make them grow, and to recognise unwholesome qualities and abandon them and not allow them to arise again.

The next faculty is Right Mindfulness, and mindfulness has two aspects: an ability to recall and the ability to know what one is doing. One remembers for example, "I am watching the breath", "I am watching this out-breath, I am watching this in-breath." And then it has this ability to remember and recall what is the purpose of watching the breath, why one is doing it.

Often people are told when meditating to watch the breath at the tip of the nose, but actually many people find that this is a distraction. If you look in the *suttas*, the *Buddha* never tells us to watch the breath in a physical place. He says to know that you are breathing in and to know that you are breathing out. The important thing is to note it in time. So: "Am I breathing in at this time, or am I breathing out at this time?"

Mindfulness also knows its goal. It recalls why we're watching the breath: so that we're knowing the breath, in each moment in time, for the purpose of calming the mind. But to achieve calm, it's also important to approach meditation with the right attitude. One has to be content to watch the breath or else you can't watch the breath; the mind will go elsewhere. So, this sense of contentment is important because it composes the mind.

There was a layman who used to come and see Ajahn Chah, who had a lot of complaints – his fields weren't producing very much, and his buffalo was getting old, and his house wasn't big enough and his kids weren't satisfying him... and he said he was getting really sick of the world, and becoming dispassionate.

And Ajahn Chah said, "No, you're not. You're not dispassionate. If you got more buffaloes, newer ones, healthier ones, and a bigger house and a lot more wealth, then you'd find that your dispassion with the world is very temporary. You just have aversion to the world." He continued, "What you need to meditate on is, 'It's good enough'. Whatever comes up in the mind: 'It's good enough'." So the man practised that for a while and the next time he came back to see Ajahn Chah he had become contented, just by meditating on 'It's good enough'.

Craving arises because we have discontentment with what we have. But when we have that sense of 'It's good enough', then the mind starts to settle down and come to a place of ease. And it's from that place of ease, well-being and contentment that the mind can go into what we call *samadhi*.

Samadhi – the next of the Spiritual Faculties – is often translated as 'concentration' but I prefer the concept of peace. It is the ability to let go of what is disturbing and go to a place in the mind which is less disturbing. As we progressively give things up and tranquillise the mind then the mind is going to become more and more peaceful and blissful. Then it can even give up blissfulness and go to a state of equanimity.

The tranquillity of meditation has a lot of benefits: it gives energy to the mind by providing a place of rest. Then when the mind comes out of that state we can put it to work. It's like our bodies: if we get over-tired we need to rest, and then when we've slept enough we can get up and go to work. We don't over-sleep and not work at all – nor do we over-work and not rest at all. There has to be a balance. Each person will have their own balance of how much the mind needs to go into tranquillity, and how much the mind needs to work, to investigate and consider, in order to develop insight and understanding.

There are various steps to calming the mind. The first is developing the sense of well-being, and contentment. Then the next is when from that contentment a sense of gladness arises. When there's gladness in the mind that leads to rapture. And that rapture then leads to tranquillity of the body, this buoyancy of the body, which

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leads to happiness: a happiness of the mind as it dwells on wholesomeness. Now when that arises, then the mind becomes concentrated. The precondition for concentration is happiness. If one asks, "Well, why am I not calm and concentrated?" it is because the mind is not dwelling happily on a wholesome object. So when you watch the breath, watch it to see its beauty. Joyfully, happily watch each in-breath, and know it as a friend that you haven't seen for a long time. With each breath that comes in, you're glad to greet that breath; and with each breath that goes out you're glad with the breath. Glad of the in-breath, glad of the out-breath. And as we do that, then the mind gradually lets go of distraction, lets go of the body, and then lets go of all thinking. The body feels light, and the mind becomes more and more calm and concentrated.

The result of calming the mind down is that one has access to wisdom. We use the *Buddh's* wisdom to develop our own. The wisdom of the *Buddh's* enlightenment is that all conditioned things are impermanent; that all conditioned things are *dukkha* and that all things are not-self. We have received that, so we put it to work with our experience, using his wisdom to cultivate our own. And in this way we come to Right View.

The *Buddha* defined Right View firstly in a conventional sense; that is a confidence in the *Buddh's* enlightenment, in the *Dhamma*; and in the *Sangha*; conviction in the efficacy of generosity; belief in heaven and hell. These are fundamentals of Right View. But the Right View which leads to liberation is that Right View which is based in the Four Noble Truths.

This Right View is also defined as the opposites to the four perversions or distortions of view. These distortions in seeing mean that we do not see the world as it truly is. Because of the perversion of the mind we see what is impermanent as permanent. Through the distortion of the mind we see what is *dukkha* as *sukha* – what is unsatisfactory as satisfying. Through the distortions and perversions of the mind, we see what is non-self as self. And we see what is not beautiful as beautiful.

I once remember asking Ajahn Chah, as to how he'd developed his immense loving-kindness. And his response was: "You're like a child who sees an adult running, and that child hasn't learnt to walk yet but wants to run." That was the first part of his response, the second part was: "When you see that all conditioned things are impermanent then you automatically have loving-kindness. You cannot not have loving-kindness." That was loving-kindness arising out of wisdom, because the wisdom of seeing things as they really are means that aversion cannot arise any more. It is cut off at its roots.

So that ability to see things with Right View; this is impermanent, this is unsatisfactory, this is not-self, is very important. Watch conditions arising in the mind: is this permanent or impermanent; for example, the aching in the knee now? Is this permanent or impermanent? – and you notice it changes, it pulsates. If it's pulsating then it's impermanent. You won't find any sensation that does not change. And if it is impermanent, it's unsatisfying. And anything that changes and cannot satisfy or be satisfied is not worthy of calling 'me' or 'mine'. Therefore that letting go process can occur.

To see the non-beautiful in those things that we take to be beautiful: now what that means is seeing that the body is not beautiful. We decorate the body and the reason we do so is to cover up its non-beautiful aspects. If we believe, "This body is me, is mine, is beautiful", then when it gets old, when it gets sick and starts to fall apart, we suffer. This body is made of up of many parts, none of which are particularly beautiful in themselves. So if a surgeon takes a body apart and puts the various organs around on a bench, there's no beauty there. The beauty of a human being comes through *Dhamma*, through virtue, through peace of mind, and through wisdom. These are what makes a human being beautiful.

So this Chithurst Monastery is a Beauty Parlour! If we cultivate and develop these Five Spiritual Faculties, then we become more and more beautiful. I think I have said enough this evening, so I will stop here, and thank you for all your kindness in listening to me.

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