

# Faith (3 of 5) Faith as Love

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## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

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This is the third talk on faith. I will talk about the quality of faith that is akin to love or related to something we might call love. When we have faith in Dharma faith, it is because something inside of us resonates with the Dharma. We recognize something inside of us that may be akin to or represents the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha – the key objects of faith in Buddhism. There is an intimacy that we develop with ourselves or the world – a sensitive, tender awareness that we have. And that intimacy can come with a feeling of warmth, joy, a deep sense of satisfaction.

Faith is a love or a joy or even a kind of desire. In ancient times, it was understood that faith is a kind of desire, a desire to be close to something. It is a desire to live close to something that we have faith in – something that we find valuable.

If an intimacy with the Dharma is found through meditation, then there is something about the desire to stay close to that tenderness, warmth, joy, and sense of well-being, which seems somehow related to faith. Faith is more than just a knowing. It's a knowing through experience. We know something because we experience it.

To love the practice – to love, in a sense, the Dharma – one way this faith expresses itself is in devotional practices – a heartfelt, emotive wanting to serve, wanting to be close to, and wanting to offer ourselves in some way to the Dharma or to the practice.

In our vipassana Insight tradition, there is very little chanting and very little ritual. People have asked sometimes, “Where’s the devotion in this practice?” A common answer that is given is that mindfulness itself is devotional activity. Of course, it isn’t automatically. But as we develop this practice, we start feeling that there’s something religiously, spiritually, or sacredly vital or enhanced through mindfulness. The mindfulness itself is something to be devoted to, something to love and to serve, to dedicate ourselves to with love, care, or generosity.

Faith has so many different qualities and aspects. For some people, there is a quality that’s akin to what I’d like

to call “love” today. I think we all know that the word “love” is very vague and covers a wide spectrum of emotions or feelings. So maybe it’s more like a koan, a question that I’m offering you.

If faith has a quality or characteristic of love in it, and love is very personal in how it is experienced, what corresponds in you to what I’m calling love – this warmth, this intimacy? This is the kind of place where we feel like, “Yes, this is home” or “This is desirable; this is satisfying.” It is something that feels like the warmest and tenderest form of dedication, love, wanting to serve, wanting to be generous, wanting to care for this thing.

How do you experience that love in yourself? What do you find in yourself that might correspond to it? You may use very different words for it. If I’m using very broad terms, what specifically works for you? Or if I’m just giving you a rough idea, maybe you have other words that somewhat correspond to it.

I’m talking about a kind of faith, dedication, or devotion where the pull or the desire to practice – to live the Dharma, to live with the precepts ethically – it just seems like a love affair. It seems like more of an expression of something that feels really good and right. There is a rightness to it, and that seems to be embodied or heartfelt. It’s not so much a cognitive belief or idea that “This is good.” It’s something that comes from feeling at

home in oneself or settled here in the heart, and then the goodness of the heart begins to shine and move forward.

For some Buddhists, what I'm calling "love in relationship to faith" is most actively expressed in "going for refuge." I love that expression. The Pali is to walk to refuge, but it can mean going as well. Going for refuge is entering, being willing out of one's free will to go somewhere, and this is the direction to go. It goes in the direction that is most meaningful, most warm-hearted – something that we feel so delighted, pleased, and inspired by.

What I'm pointing to here is that faith sometimes has very strong heartfelt qualities to it. It can be an aspect of the heart. What does it take to allow this to happen? I think that an access to it is through being quiet enough, less and less distracted, less caught up in desires and aversions, and really settled down so that we are intimate and present with our direct experience.

The word "yes," which we used in the meditation, may be an expression of that love. Yes – to be here in awareness, to be here practicing the Dharma. To be here in this ethical goodness that we feel – not that we impose external ethics or moral rules on top of us, but we recognize the ethics that comes from a settled, clear, peaceful heart. "Yes, *this* is right; this is good. This is

what I love. This is where I want to center my life, base my life on – a source from which to live my life.”

What would it be like for you to live your life where a source for that life is love? Dharma love – not erotic love, not even love for friends – some kind of deeper existential love, some way in which we’re not afraid. We’re not troubled or anguished by anything, but all those things that cause anguish and trouble are held in a wonderful, growing capacity of the heart that holds everything.

There’s an expression in our Insight tradition that became the title of Sharon Salzberg’s book: *A Heart as Wide as the World*. One of the purposes of this deep, heartfelt faith may be to have a heart that can hold all things, as wide as the world, and then to care for the world we live in as a natural expression of that.

Thank you. We will continue with two more talks on the concept of faith.