

# Entering the Sacred: Balancing the Five Indriya

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From a Retreat at Insight Meditation Society,  
Barre Massachusetts, May 2 – May 11, 2008

Entering the sacred....

One of the Buddha's first comments when he came back to teach the Dhamma to his five former colleagues was: "The doors of the Deathless are open, let those who can hearken, who can listen, who can attend carefully, let them bring forth their faith...."

In a way, this is perhaps, in less grand terms, where we all come in. We have a certain degree of faith, willingness, openness, some feeling that this is worth doing. It's not exactly belief, but something lights up. We recognize or we begin to sense something about the way we're living. We want to move into or find a different gear, a different place to review it from than just the ongoing event stream of doing this, and doing that, and being happy, and being sad, and so forth, just kind of getting along. We know there's another realm, another dimension, another way of holding this, another way of being present.

This is what's called spiritual quest or search or enquiry. What is that?

It's something, of course, that's been pretty much part of human experience for millennia, the sacred. People realize something. Something is actually experienced, so there's a faith that that can be experienced. There's also a sense that it has been experienced by others. And we begin with what gives that impression. We acknowledge people who are more peaceful, more clear, less caught up, less reactive. Also who can refer to ways of looking at our lives that suddenly take the stress out of them, that make sense. There's a very pragmatic result to realization. There's realization, and a realized being can also understand this world in a way that makes it make sense. It no longer catches us. We know how to do good, we know what's right, we know how to live justly and impeccably and with compassion.

So it makes sense, in this realm, and it has its own dimension, which is not easy to define in terms of this particular realm. The entrance to that is faith.

One remembers such a thing is possible, one senses it is possible, one feels it should be possible, and you realize other beings have sensed that. There's something that

tells you that. You look at very practical results because anybody can talk about mystical experiences, but what you really look at is whether the person is living morally. Are they living righteously, are they living with kindness and compassion, are they themselves caught up with aversion or greed or confusion, or not? Once you start to see someone who is not acting in that way, or hear of people not acting that way, then something lights up. That's what it's all about. It's about the ending of greed, hatred and delusion.

You can tell what's not there. It's easy to define what's gone, easier than to define what's present. And that's the Buddhist approach, really. Rather than talk about the Deathless in a lot of terms, it's saying it's the absence of these other qualities. And that gives one faith, because it's very practical, and very much discernable. You can sense it in yourself. Where does the hunger, resistance, confusion, restlessness, where do those pass away? Where do they end, or what leads to their ending? Then you know you're on the right track, and you get faith in yourself and in what you're doing.

So faith is an important thing. It's both a realization of the possible, and a realization that something has been realized, so it gives you the conviction to continue with what you're doing.

Faith is called one of the five indriya. Indriya means something like "leaders". The five indriya are: faith, saddha; viriya, energy or persistent effort, a kind of energized zest for "do it", an ability to sustain; sati, mindfulness, the ability to bear something in mind and stay with it, and really contemplate the results of what one is doing; samadhi, collectedness or concentration, a state of unification of mind, where all the energies of body and mind have merged. There are no loose ends, there's no distractedness, it's the kind of harmony and unification of all of the energies that are present in us. Body energy, energy of thought, energy of the heart, they become unified and there's a state of calm and consolidation; and there's pañña, which means wisdom or discernment.

These are the five indriya. It's said in the scriptures that these five merge in the Deathless. The Deathless is difficult to describe, but one way of looking at it is where the indriya merge, or unite.

Sometimes the way this particular teaching is given is to sense how there are a couple of paired opposites. Faith is paired with discernment, with pañña. These two come together because although faith is essential, as a feeling, it has to be measured out with discernment. Discernment is very specific. Faith tends to be a kind of quality of heart, an uplift, a willingness, a kind of issuing forth, a devotion.

Discernment is much more moment at a time specific. It's a quality of mind, you might say. You can actually see the differences between this and that. Without discernment, faith becomes blind. You can get a kind of devotion where there's no discrimination, no discernment. In this way it becomes unbalanced and faith becomes something that people just get high on, like devotional cults or devotional systems. Without discernment, the main theme of it is that you just get sort of an uplift experience, over things that arouse faith. Images, ideas, all the kind of stuff that can go along with that. So you have to balance it out with discernment.

Discernment is very much moment at a time practical. Meditation is a practice that relies a lot upon discernment. It's how you bring attention onto the body, onto how you're feeling right now, onto what's arising, because it's not all the same thing.

Sometimes you've got to just step back. Sometimes you review. Sometimes you move in, and depending on whether it's a thought or a mood or emotion, discernment determines exactly how you meet that.

People often find that they begin to learn this around things like the thinking mind. The mind is thinking a lot and you don't want it to be thinking, you want to quiet down. How do you meet the thinking mind? It's like you're trying to flick something off, you're trying to make it shut up. It's like you've got a toffee or the wrapper of a candy or something stuck on your finger, and you're trying to flick it off, but it won't go away. So you brush it with the other hand, and it sticks to the other hand, and the more you flap around the more stuck it gets.

And you're thinking about something and you try to stop thinking about it. You decide you won't think about that particular thing. As soon as you've thought about not thinking about it, you've thought about it again.

"I mustn't think about elephants." – "That's interesting, elephants!" – "STOP thinking about elephants!" – "What kind of elephants should I stop thinking about?" (Laughter). You've actually brought the creature in.

So you find that the most useful way is with discernment, because you can sense how you can actually get past thought, instead of meeting it by looking at the topic. Particularly if it's an unpleasant thought, like a thought of malice toward somebody else, aversion, or worry about particular problems you're trying to figure out the answer to. Generally you're trying to kind of get rid of it, you don't want it.

Actually, to meet thinking is mostly a matter of really, first of all, deciding if it's useful to think it or not. Just bringing to mind, is this useful to think about? If it's useful to think about, it means it should arrive at a solution, like: "Where did I put my car keys?" Okay, that's finished.

"What am I going to do with my life?" is a bit more difficult. (Laughter). So, is it actually a useful thought, or not? If it's a useful thought, it should have a finite period of time for you to come to a conclusion. If it's not useful, then why are you still thinking it? It's got stuck.

So you begin to see which thoughts are worth thinking, and which aren't worth thinking. If they're not worth thinking, then how do you get past that?

It's really by referring to the emotion behind the thought, whether it's worry, aversion, craving. You just go to the sense of the basic emotion or impulse that's moving that thought along. You've started to actually drop the specifics of the topic and just go to that energy, and then you meet the energy of that. You actually contemplate the clawing of craving, and then you see it in a much more simple way. Or the resistance of aversion. And then it's a matter of just actually relaxing it. You go past the topic of the thought to the energy of it. Then, when you meditate, you can learn how to steady your energy through breathing in, breathing out, you widen your focus, widen it across your body. Just by widening the focus, and focussing on the change of energy, you can clear that particular energy pattern.

Have you ever tried this? See how most thinking just builds up, charges, tightens up, comes into your head. The reason why we do a lot of body meditation, why we do breathing meditation, is to be able to take charge of the energies resource that thinking

and emotions feed upon. If you deliberately quiet the energy down, then it's not available. So if you bring your energy back into the body, soften it, relax it, relax the palms of the hands, let your breath drop, quiet your breathing down, slow it down, refine it, you'll find that the thinking stops by itself. It can't keep going. To meet it like that, discernment is required.

Sometimes you can consider meeting thinking with *patikula*, which means thinking in the opposite way. For example when you feel aversion towards a person, or an animal, a living creature, then instead of considering that creature's fearful or disgusting or unpleasant characteristics, you can deliberately bring to mind characteristics that bring up qualities of kindness and compassion.

Mostly we get upset by people. Most interestingly, you get upset by people you hardly know, like public figures, because generally you only see them doing their weird thing. Certain politicians, for example, because you only ever see this guy doing his weird, crazy stuff. You never see him when he's asleep, when he's probably quite pleasant, or having a bath, or feeding a dog, or something like that. You don't see him like that, you only see him pontificating and saying stupid statements or ruining the world! (Laughter). But apart from that, he's a really nice guy! (Laughter). So when you start to see, you can actually consider that with people you dislike, people you have difficult times with, you actually only have difficult times with certain behaviours they go through.

Like you have a boss, or something. You find that you're always in this situation with this person telling you what to do, and they're demanding. That's what bosses are about, or can be about. It's not the person you dislike, it's just the behaviour. But because you only ever see that behaviour, you think the behaviour is the person. You need to consider, what's this person like when they're sick? Or when they're happy? Or when they're meeting a loved one? Or when they're sleeping? ... Oh, yeah... And you can actually keep that image in mind. Then you can change the way you see the behaviours this person almost certainly goes through, because you can actually see the person as separate from those behaviours that irritate you. It just gives you some perspective on it.

That's where you can meet particular forms of aversion just by wise reflection.

If it's an inanimate thing, something like an ugly piece of architecture, or hideous furnishings that annoy you, then you try to consider them more as elements, stuff. It's amazing how these things can really get to us. You go to a place and the first thing you notice is they've got tangerine curtains, or something like that. There are the famous last words of Oscar Wilde when he was lying on his deathbed. He looked at the curtains and said: "Either the curtains or I have to go!" (Laughter). He checked out. He kept his wits about him. (Laughter).

And then you look at revolting things, like excrement or vomit, as just pure elemental matter. Colour is just colour. Forms are just forms.

And then if you've got the opposite problem, obsession or craving for things like jewellery or gadgets or cars or clothes – inanimate stuff - then you consider what it's going to look like when it's broken or when it's fifteen years old. This fashion is really amazing this year, but in three years' time, who wears that rubbish anymore?

It's interesting when you look at cars, particularly. The really new ones look amazing, then about three years old they look tired, then ten years old, they look classic. The actual perception of them changes.

Then if it's other people you feel obsessed with, impassioned with, then you look at what is least attractive, or what it is that attracts. It could be a detail - the eyes or the skin or the hair - or it could be the whole thing. You can see actually that the mind is just picking up one particular perception and focussing in on that. You don't normally notice the toenails, or the ear holes or the nostrils or the gums, or something like that. Not that these are particularly unpleasant, they're just nothing, really. You're hardly going to hear someone singing and crooning over someone's gums. Teeth, maybe, but not the gums, or the tongue.

What happens if you actually imagine if the skin's removed, or what the skin's like when it's crinkled? You know, it's a big thing, because you see that what is often presented in magazines and photographs, it doesn't actually exist. It's a sort of one in a hundred thousand person. You take the image under a particular light, and then they touch it up and colour it. The person doesn't actually exist. You can see the immense pain that's caused by these images. Craving, and people trying to get to look like that, and feeling inadequate if you're not like that.

So it's really important to be able to get free of that, so you can feel value in other people that's not just about skin, or hair, things that are so transitory.

So start to contemplate these things, and what they really are. Elements. Protoplasm. Cells. And you can see the kind of glitter that gets put over everything, what it is.

Coming through airports, you have to walk through these immense shopping malls. You start to walk through them, to get to the departure lounge. I haven't got any money, anyway, so there's nothing I can buy, and the chance of getting a bottle of Johnny Walker or a Rolex watch or Channel #5, or... Even when I did have money....

Yet it's amazing how the very presentation of these kinds of things, which you have no possibility or no interest in actually acquiring, somehow they present comfort, satisfaction, mystique. It's really something how a bottle of liquid can look like the most magnetic and desirable object in the world. It's fairy dust. It's a kind of glitter and sheen that you can put over everything. So just to see something in its elemental nature, rather than just the immediate dazzle, that takes pañña to discern, and mindfulness to actually bear in mind, and effort to keep sustaining that.

But the result is... it's not particularly these objects that you are concerned with, because the objects don't do it, they're completely harmless. It's the perceptions of the mind. It's what the mind brings up. There's absolutely nothing wrong with sights, sounds, touches, odours, so forth, they're completely harmless. You don't have to be on guard against them, but against what is evoked in the mind.

So when we practice, you're not actually trying to perceive people as loathsome, or things as one thing or the other. We're actually working with the mystique that the mind creates around things, so that when it doesn't do that, there's a lovely sense of openness and clarity. When something ceases, when the dream ceases, the real presents itself. The sense of clarity, the sense of freedom, the mind feels clear. That's what we're doing with these kind of practices of discernment. Learning how to meet the glittering, and the troubling, and the agitating, and the button-pushing, and the

infuriating. Learning to meet it - we actually want to meet it - in order to discharge our fear, our aversion, our passion, our delusion. Then you can see things as they are.

So this is really interesting, the value of faith and discernment together. Faith is the encouragement that it's possible in this realm. This realm of human beings, this realm of forms, this realm of birth and death, this realm of feelings and sensations, it's possible. It's this realm that we can do it in. We don't have to be away from all this. It's possible for human beings with the ordinary, standard set of feelings and passions and joys and sorrows. It's possible, it's arrived at through discernment. Through seeing, as it's sometimes said, in the world, through seeing the world as it actually is.

Learning how to meet it, not buy it, not glance at it, really to meet it. That gives me a sense of great faith and interest. I'm interested in my delusions! That's good, because I've got quite a few! (Laughter). How am I getting caught by this? How am I getting worried or agitated about this? What button is it pushing in me?

You start to see that a lot of what one does is marked with expectation, hope, and fear, with the feeling of the result one should achieve and the fear of not achieving it, and that can go through just anything. And valuing oneself around those, a sense of success or failure. Just contemplate that. What do you expect? What do you think the pass-mark is? What do you think it would be like to be a successful person? What does it mean? You start to look at the kind of criteria that one's mind creates that you can never achieve.

And there are those things where we feel that there is something wrong with us. That you have some particular foible or flaw that nobody else has. Everybody else has it! (Laughter). Everybody gets upset, everybody gets depressed, everybody gets anxious, everybody gets to feel guilty, everybody has regrets. It's not all they have...

So when we start to really look at the kind of things we buy into as somehow defining ourselves, those are the bits you want to meet with wisdom. Meet how you define yourself, how you make yourself small or constricted or trapped. We do it to ourselves. We believe in certain syndromes, and programs, or health difficulties, or mental habits as defining us. And because we don't want to meet them, we want to get rid of them, we don't want to have them, we try to look the other way, we want to pull out of them.

Learning to meet them requires faith. And it is just in meeting these that you will become free of them. Not going somewhere else, or becoming something, but in actually meeting what you sense yourself as being, and seeing it's "just that." Once you've met it properly, you're no longer caught in it.

So notice the points where something says: "Oh, you can't!" or, "Oh, give up!" Or that kind of resigned gesture in the mind. That sense of: "You can't do this, you're not there, you can't make it." Notice how we can believe in that. I'm sure that we all can experience that. It's not that you shouldn't experience it, but you can feel the energy of it and how, when that catches you, something in your energy just goes down. The point is not to not have that, but to just stay there present with these particular forms, such as the sense of resignation or failure or whatever it is. "Ah hmmm.....?" Really pause with that, pause with the energy of that. Just steady your mind, steady your awareness with the energy of that, and you'll find that the energy may shift, but it won't catch you. It will kind of loosen, it softens and disappears. It's rather like that.

Some of the things we most automatically assume ourselves as defined by, that's what it means to include it all. Meet what arises, and include it all, including that one, the shadow that says: "Oh no, you've already followed it!" Those kind of knee-jerk reactions, those are the ones you really want to look out for. Just pause. Ah hmmm...? What is that? What does it feel like? What's happening in your body? What happens if you wait with that? What happens if you just widen and soften and open with that? What happens? Just be curious.

So naturally, this takes discernment.

It also takes a kind of persistence, thoroughness. Persistence is not just a kind of commando-style charge of energy. It's a thorough quality of sniffing around like a terrier, looking under stones, checking out this, checking out that, keep working at it. There are little bits that seem insignificant, the habits, the habit patterns that we limit ourselves by. The times we go to bed, the times we wake up, what we think our lives are defined by. Ordinary little habits. They're not necessarily massive ones or evil ones. The really difficult ones really stand out. You also have to be aware of the ones that are just casual.

Because the hindrances and the defilements that come up in black and red, we know about. It's the ones that come in softly, like fine dust, just softly falling - the getting by, the taking for granted, the "another day will do." It's the fine dust that over days and years builds up and muddies the brightness of practice.

Sometimes I find a really useful reflection in developing persistence is the reflection on death. It helps to clear the dust. It says: "What if you die tonight?" Not that I want to die tonight! Well, sometimes I do! (Laughter). But no, it's just a way of saying: "Where was I going? What was I imagining my future was about? What was I hanging onto? What was I postponing? What were the things I was saying: 'Oh yeah, I'll get around to that?' What was the kind of luggage I was carrying along thinking: 'Oh yeah, I'll sort that around sometime. I've got to make sure, I've got to do this, I've got to get this done.'" All the grudges, and the unforgiven bits.

So this is useful, because we can sometimes have the sense that the doors of the Deathless are open - so I'll go through them tomorrow! (Laughter). "If it's all available here and now, then, well, right here and now, I'm a bit busy, but tomorrow's here and now will do. Or next year or maybe next lifetime, yes, I'll meditate. I must get round to that. Well right now I'm busy, and probably by the weekend or next year I'll be here and now." Because it's always available, there's that sense.

Well, yes and no.

It's only available if you really sharpen up. There is a condition to entering that, which is bringing forth the fullness. It's a useful thing, it's spring cleaning, really, contemplation of death. You just clear the desktop. What's important here, what's really important in all this? Just step back. In all of this, what's really important? What really matters ... to you?

It's a good question. Take some time considering it. It sort of shakes things down. Sometimes you can do it more gently like that. Say: "Do you want to be doing what you're doing, do you want to be doing this in five years' time, living this way in five years time?" - "Well no." - So why are you doing it now? (Laughter).

Why are you doing it now? What if you only have a week left, why are you doing what you're doing now? What is it we don't want to face up to, we don't want to let go of, we want to postpone? Be thorough. So your life is actually something you are continually keeping a check on, keeping in touch with, keeping responsibility for. It's passing... It's passing. All we can know about it is, that there is less of it everyday.

It may be there's not much left. So you don't want to be just looking at the wallpaper, or doodling. I think this is particularly important when our lives become very full of information and things to get fired up about. What's important for you now? What can you do? If you get that right, the rest of it can follow on from there. Persistence. Thoroughness.

One of the things that is important is to find the quality of collectedness, one-pointedness, so you are really with what you're doing. This is what samadhi is about. Samadhi isn't the action of concentration, it's the result of putting things together, of clearing, of meeting things correctly so that redundant thoughts fade out, purposeful energies come to the fore, and things gather together.

It's more than just the meditation experience, it's actually a way of life, becoming more unified in what we're doing, one-pointed. What's important?

What's important in terms of how we are with others? To have been truthful, to have been direct, to have been compassionate. Otherwise, don't bother.

What's important in what we're doing? Is it providing for our needs, or is it just getting by?

What's important? Don't bother with stuff that's not important. Because it will always drain you. It will always eat you. For many people this kind of thing is what happens. They're eaten by the circumstances of their lives - by their houses, by their cars, by their jobs, by their relationships, just eaten up by it.

And you've always got to remember that when you go... (laughter) .... there will be a kind of plop in the pond and the water settles and you go, and the rest of it goes on! (Laughter). And all of the things that you were holding together, that you thought you had to do, you disappear and somebody else will do it. So don't get eaten by these things. Do what you do because it's coming from your own joyfulness, your own love, your own compassion, your own clarity, your own truthfulness. Don't live under a debt.

If you live like that, your mind actually will come into unity. This is much more than just trying to ram it into silence at the end of the day or on a retreat. It's a matter of knowing what's important, because actually if you get your activities to line up in accordance with what your values are, then those values - truthfulness, clarity, kindness, steadiness, whatever it is, those kind of qualities - that's what's going to be there. Those are the factors that give you collected mind, peace of mind. Their energies are not turning around, they're not chewed up, they're steadied.

Of course, in the middle of all these five factors you have mindfulness, which is the ability to bear in mind, to sustain attention on what you're doing, on what's happening, on what the results are. What's the result of our efforts, what's the result of our restfulness, what's the result of our actions, what's the result of our inactions?

Sometimes inaction is what's needed. You notice the results. For that you need mindfulness. Bear yourself in mind.

So these are what are called the five indriya, the five leaders of awakening.

They gather round. This is what they do. They transform this apparent external realm of sights and sounds, of the future and the past, and what we should and what we aren't. But which is actually all acquired. It's all surface, and they transform it. You start to see that all these things emanate in the mind. That is how we're touched by sights, sounds, thoughts, ideas. You come back into that sense of how we're affected, how we're touched, what pushes us, what we're touched by, and you become clear about that, until you are no longer held. You can be responsive, but you're not held by sights, sounds, touches, thoughts, opinions, views and so on. You transform that from something that seems to be other people out there into something your own mind is responsible for and can deconstruct.

The deconstruction of that is the descent into the Deathless.