**‘Balance is Everything’: A Teaching on the 5 Spiritual Faculties**

Contains An Analogy, Teachings,

At Home Practices, and Further Resources

Imagine a team of five horses. One horse leads, and two pairs of horses follow. The horses are pulling a cart. As taught by the Buddha, the horses represent the 5 Spiritual Faculties, one of the important lists in the training of awakening.

As the late monastic Ayya Kema put it, “The lead horse (mindfulness) can go as fast or as slow as it likes, the others have to fall into step with it. The pairs have to be in balance with each other, otherwise of one goes faster than the other the wagon will topple.”

Faith Energy

Mindfulness Cart of Self

Wisdom Concentration

**What are the 5 Spiritual Faculties?**

**Faith**. **Trust & confidence in higher values**

Sometimes spoken about as Trust or Confidence, maturing the quality of Faith is an important refuge on the spiritual path. As it matures, faith grows through three main stages. Blind Faith is experienced as blindly believing in something we have not yet experienced for ourselves. Borrowed Faith is experienced as trusting in someone else’s faith. Verified Faith is experienced when we have truly seen for ourselves what to believe in, and the confidence in direct experience this illuminates. The practice of dharma is based on developing Verified Faith.

Practice: For a week or two, practice one of the Divine Abode qualities (lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity) and observe if there is any influence on your feelings of faith (trust).

**Energy. Vigorous effort towards the wholesome**

Sometimes spoken about as the fuel of Vigor or Enthusiasm behind Wise Effort, maturing the quality of Energy allows us to practice wisely with the four aspects of Wise Effort:

1. Avoiding unwholesome thoughts, speech, actions before they arise (preventative medicine)

2. Abandoning unwholesome thoughts, speech, actions when they arise

(transformation)

3. Cultivating the seeds of wholesome thoughts, speech, actions before they arise (‘on the lookout’ for the good)

4. Maintaining and perfecting wholesome thoughts, speech, actions when they arise (keep going!)

Practice: Work with one aspect of Wise Effort per week for a month.

**Mindfulness. Attentive awareness**

Sometimes spoken about as a specific type of present moment based attention exemplifying the aspects of non-judgment, the maturing the quality of Mindfulness allows discernment to grow.

Practice: Chose one period of time each day in which you are more mindful of the body. Perhaps during your morning or evening routines, or during a transition period which occurs each day.

**Concentration. Focused attention**

Sometimes spoken about as the ability of the attention to remain focused on one object (say the breath in meditation), the maturing qualities of Concentration include the power of the mind to become completely absorbed with an object.

Reflection & Practice: In your daily life, notice where the quality of concentration is stronger for you, and notice what helps you nurture it.

**Wisdom. Intelligent understanding**

Sometimes spoken about as Wise Understanding through direct experience, the maturing quality of Wisdom clearly sees the Three Characteristics of Existence.

1. Everything changes (impermanence)

2. When we hold on, it hurts (unsatisfactory)

3. It’s not personal (not self)

Practice: Notice how the Three Characteristics (impermanence, unsatisfactory, not self) manifest in your daily life.

**Why is Mindfulness the Lead Horse in the Analogy?**

The commentaries talk about the importance of wisdom and concentration restraining their counterparts of faith and vigor (energy). However mindfulness as a quality stands on it’s own.

"Mindfulness should be strong everywhere. For it protects the mind from excitedness, into which it might fall since faith, vigor and wisdom may excite us; and from indolence, into which it might fall since concentration favors indolence. Therefore, mindfulness is desirable everywhere, like a seasoning of salt in all sauces, like the prime minister in all state functions. Hence it is said: 'The Buddha has declared mindfulness to be useful everywhere, for the mind finds refuge in mindfulness and mindfulness is its protector. Without mindfulness there can be no exertion or restraint of the mind.' " **Vissudhimaggha IV, 49 Edward Conze** (translator)

**How do the other Two Pairs of Qualities Balance each other?**

\* Without the balance of Wisdom, Faith becomes Blind or Dogmatic.

\* Without the balance of Faith, Wisdom becomes Dry or Rigid.

\* Without the balance of Concentration, Energy becomes Agitated or Restless.

\* Without the balance of Energy, Concentration becomes Weak or Slothful.

**The Cart of Self: Heather’s Addition to the Horse Team Analogy**

I like to think of the cart the horses are pulling as ‘the cart of self’. When we are beginning to develop the five spiritual faculties the small contracted sense of self is very much running the show, shouting orders, trying to get everything under control, to go as desired. The ‘cart of self’ is quite ‘heavy’ in this state. As the lead horse of mindfulness matures, the other pairs relax more and more into balance. As balance increases, the ‘cart of self’ also starts to relax, and lighten up. By the time the five spiritual faculties have fully aligned and matured, it’s as if they are just pulling along an ‘empty cart of self’. We can continue to use the ‘cart of self’ to be functional and caring beings, but we no longer have to ‘run the show’. The awakened qualities of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom now lead the way.

**Concluding Quote from Ayya Kema:**

“To become a master of all of these aspects is an ideal but to practice them is a necessity. And since all of us have these faculties within, there is every reason to cultivate them. One finds oneself a more harmonious and balanced person, with less difficulties, capable of helping others. To develop these five faculties should be a primary object in one's life. The balancing of them needs to be seen as connecting heart with mind.” **Ayya Kema**

**Further Resources:**

\* For more on this teaching, visit Heather’s Talk given at SIM in January 2013. Link

\* To Be Seen Here and Now, 10 Talks (Chapter 7) by Ayya Kemma on Access to Insight http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/khema/herenow.html#ch7