

Dharma Drum Mountain Toronto: Selected Readings from the Saṃyukta Āgama

Lecture 5 | May 09, 2026

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Confidence, Purified Confidence, and Wholesome Roots: The Psychological Foundations of the Path to Liberation

— The requisites for the Path-Truth of the Four Noble Truths

Stage 1: Breaking down the question — Blind Faith or Wise Faith?

Amid Toronto's fast-paced lifestyle, we often ask ourselves: What should I believe?

- **Definition and Clarification:** In Buddhism, "Faith" (*śraddhā*) is not blind belief (Blind Faith) in the Western sense, but rather "trust based on investigation."
 - **Faith as a Support for Practice:** Faith is the traveler's provisions on a long journey. Without faith, one lacks the sustained motivation needed for practice.
 - **Three Criteria of Right Faith:** Permanence, Universality, and Inevitability. It is a submission to the Law of Causality, not a transaction of benefits with deities.
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Stage 2: Core Principle — Cultivating the Seeds of the Mind

2.1. The Farming Metaphor: Faith as the Seed (*Saṃyukta Āgama*, Sutra 98)

When a Brahmin questioned the Buddha for not performing "productive labor," the Buddha proposed a system of "Spiritual Agriculture":

- **Faith as the Seed:** The starting point of all wholesome dharmas.
- **Diligence as the Timely Rain:** Irrigating the field of the mind to prevent it from withering.
- **Wisdom as the Guiding Yoke:** Setting the direction and breaking up the hardened soil of ignorance
- **Harvest:** What is ultimately gained is the "nectar-fruit" that transcends birth and death — Nirvāṇa.

2.2. The Five Faculties: The Five Driving Forces of Practice (*Samyukta Āgama*, Sutra 647)

The Buddha defined the foundation of practice through the "Five Faculties", the five spiritual "roots" that transform an ordinary person into a sage:

- **The Faculty of Faith:** Firm confidence in the truth that cannot be shaken by worldly phenomena.
- **The Faculty of Diligence:** The Four Right Efforts (abandoning the unwholesome and cultivating the wholesome).
- **The Faculty of Mindfulness:** The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (body, feeling, mind, and dharmas).
- **The Faculty of Concentration:** The Four Dhyanas (mental stability and stillness).
- **The Faculty of Wisdom:** Knowing the Four Noble Truths as they truly are.

2.3. The Sequential Teaching of "The Preliminary Dharma" and "The Essentials of the True Dharma"

In the Buddha's time, many laypeople and ascetics who first encountered the Dharma still carried deep attachment to the five sensual pleasures, or felt fear and confusion when facing the reality of life. If the Buddha were to begin by directly teaching profound truths such as "all conditioned phenomena are impermanent" or "all dharmas are non-self," listeners would often feel alarmed—or even fall into nihilistic views that deny all meaning. To address this psychological barrier, the Buddha compassionately established a progressive sequence of instruction known as "The Preliminary Dharma" (端正法) and "The Essentials of the True Dharma" (正法要).

- **The Preliminary Dharma:** This refers to the Buddha's preliminary teachings on generosity (*dāna*), ethical conduct (*śīla*) and the path to heavenly rebirth. He also explained the downfall and danger of the five sensual pleasures, the impurity of the cycle of birth and death, and the virtues of renunciation.
- **Entering The Essentials of the True Dharma:** Once the listener's mind was like a field that had been plowed, fertilized, softened, and cleared of the "weeds" of intense mental hindrances, the Buddha would then deliver the Essentials of the True Dharma; i.e. teachings of the Four Noble Truths (Suffering, its Origin, its Cessation, and the Path).

Stage 3: Deepening the Practice - Wisdom as the Lead and the Four Indestructible Faiths

3.1. The Great Hall Metaphor: Wisdom is the main support of the structure (*Saṃyukta Āgama*, Sutras 656, 658)

The Buddha emphasized that among the Five Faculties, one must "take wisdom as the lead."

- **Analogy:** In a grand building (great hall), the roof beam is the most critical part; it supports and holds all other materials together. Faith without the guidance of wisdom is blind; diligence without the guidance of wisdom is futile.

3.2. The Four Indestructible Faiths: Unshakable Clarity (*Saṃyukta Āgama*, Sutra 836)

This is the sign of mature faith and the characteristic of "Entering the Stream" (*Sotapanna*, the first stage of awakening):

Level	Content	Modern Life Significance
Indestructible Faith in the Buddhas	Confidence that enlightenment is possible.	Believing in the human potential for perfect wisdom.
Indestructible Faith in the Dharma	Confidence in Causality and Dependent Origination.	Recognizing truth as a verifiable law.
Indestructible Faith in the Sangha	Confidence in the community and lineage.	Knowing that the path is supported by teachers and companions, you are not alone.
Accomplishment in the Noble Precepts	Confidence in the power of ethics.	Precepts are not restrictions but protective guardrails for the mind.

Scriptural Evidence

- **Sutra 574 (Citta the Householder and the "Faith of Direct Realization"):** A non-Buddhist ascetic attempted to test whether Citta's confidence in the Dharma was merely blind obedience. Citta replied: "Venerable sir, whenever I wish, I can enter the first *dhyāna*; and if I wish, I can further enter the second *dhyāna*, free from applied and sustained thought... Having personally attained such knowledge and vision, why would I need to 'believe' the words of other ascetics or brahmins?"

Doctrinal Contrast

Type

Characteristics

Spiritual Level

Conformable faith (blind faith)	Not based on personal realization; relies on external authority	Religious belief of outer-path
Faculty of faith (initial faith)	Based on understanding and resolve, but not yet confirmed by direct experience	The initial motivation for practice
Purified Confidence (Indestructible Faith)	Grounded in personal realization; cannot be shaken	The liberation established after seeing the Dharma

- **Sutra 1184 (The Fire-Worshipping Brahmin as a Cautionary Example):** A brahmin placed his religious faith in external fire rituals. The Buddha instructed him: "Abandon the wood-fire; kindle the inner fire within... [burn with] non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion... Let Right Faith be your great river, and Pure Virtue your means of crossing."

Principle of the Doctrine:

True faith must be fueled by "Wholesome Roots" (the absence of greed, hatred, and delusion) as the inner flame, rather than external rituals. Religious acts performed without these wholesome roots serve only to reinforce ignorance.

- **Dharma Fuel Station: Master Yin Shun's Interpretive Nuances**

The Teacher's Unique Insight:

Ven. Yinshun (印順導師) draws a sharp and essential distinction between conformable faith (blind faith) and purified confidence.

The conventional religion often emphasizes blind faith (absolute obedience and no questioning allowed). This approach risks falling into superstition or blind followership. In contrast, the "faith" spoken of in the *Āgamas* is: "A firm confidence grounded in rational reflection and verified through practice... a purified faith arising from correct understanding."

Stage 4: Living Chan_ Finding Your Grounding in the City

Practice 1: Morning Settling in the Three Jewels (5 Mins)

After waking up and before checking emails, sit quietly, breathe, and recite inwardly:

1. "I trust that awakening is possible" (Faith in the Buddha)
 2. "I trust that the law of causality is real" (Faith in the Dharma)
 3. "I trust in the strength of my companions." (Faith in the Sangha)
 4. "Today I will keep one precept (e.g., Not speaking negatively about others)" (Faith in the Precepts)
- **Practice 2: The "Moment of Doubt" Awareness Method**

When you are exhausted at work and begin to question the meaning of your practice:

 - **Recognizing:** Tell yourself, "This is doubt. It is just a thought."
 - **Grounding:** Take three deep abdominal breaths to return to the body.
 - **Retrieving Evidence:** Recall one small moment when practice brought you joy or calm. Use that memory as an anchor to steady the wavering mind.
 - **Practice 3: The Confidence Journal (Weekly)**

Record how the "Dharma" worked this week. *Example: "When my boss criticized me, I observed impermanence and stayed angry for one minute less."* Accumulating this evidence transforms "hearsay" into "realization."

Conclusion: Take a Seed with You

- **What is Faith?** It is a rational trust in the possibility of enlightenment.
- **What is the function of faith?** It is the ticket to begin the journey and the strength to keep walking.

The Buddha's words: *"Faith is the seed. By being here today, you have already planted it."*