

THE FIVE HINDRANCES

A talk given by Ajahn Brahmavamso at Bodhinyana Monastery

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This is the sixth talk of the rains retreat. I try to structure the talks during a retreat to make sure the first part of the instructions are focussed on one thing, and one thing only, which is the development of *samādhi*¹. The Buddha talked about the triple practise, *sīla*², *samādhi*, and *paññā*³, in this monastery, especially at this time of the year, the community is keeping a very sufficient practise of *sīla*. Your restraint and the keeping of the precepts⁴ are admirable, so one usually doesn't need to talk too much about that.

You'll find that solitude is one of the best ways of encouraging the maintenance of the precepts. The more people meet together, talk, and associate with one another the more opportunity there is for breaking the precepts. It allows the defilement's of the mind to arise, which is the cause of precepts being broken. In solitude the precepts are less likely to be broken because the stimulation of living amongst other people, of being in company, is absent and therefore you are less likely to err.

Overcoming the Hindrances

So this time of solitude, of monks being alone, and not engaging in conversations, of not doing so much, is a time of great purity for your precepts. That is why I focus in this first half of the retreat, on using whatever tools, skilful means, or tricks that I have learnt in my lifetime as a meditator, to instruct you, encourage, and inspire you on the path to develop deeper and deeper *samādhi*. The purpose of *samādhi* is to overcome the five hindrances⁵, and to provide the data that insight can work on. That data and insight will come later on in this retreat.

Sometimes people rush ahead of themselves, start thinking and forming views about reality, before they have experience of such things as *jhānas*⁶. Such speculation is merely *papañca*⁷, ideas, fantasies, and dreams, and so I like to leave that until much

later in the retreat. The deliberate idea of overcoming these five hindrances is important because it is the five hindrances that block the door to both the *jhānas*, and wisdom. It's the five hindrances that fuel *avijjā*⁸. The Buddha said that they're the nutriments, the food of delusion. And so if those five hindrances are present you cannot trust your ideas, or your views.

It's one of those self evident truths that everybody thinks they are right, there is not a person in this room who would say they have wrong view, they always think they are right. If they were wrong then in that sense they are right, because they have finally seen that they were wrong. What they are really saying is that they weren't wrong. No one can ever say, "I am wrong". Just think about that for a while, just think, "I am wrong" and if that is really true it means that "I'm right", because if they say "I'm wrong" they are mistaken. So if they are right they can't be wrong, it's impossible. That's philosophy, and that's as far as I am going with philosophy in this talk. But everyone believes they are right and that is something that is fascinating to contemplate.

In the early years of my monastic life I wondered, "Why is it that good monks argue, and that people in this world have differences of opinion?" We can see the reason why, it is because of the work of the five hindrances, which bend perception, bend reality, bend thought, and bend view to suit their purposes. In psychology we call that denial, we see what we want to see, we perceive what we think is there. That's why there are so many people in this world committed, absolutely sure, absolutely certain that they are on the right path. Some people who are committed absolutely even believing that they are Stream Winners⁹, Non Returners¹⁰, or Arahants¹¹ in this world, and they can't see the truth because of the power of the hindrances.

So these hindrances are important to actually to know, and to overcome. There is an acid test to know whether those hindrances are overcome, that test is the ability to enter into a *jhāna*, because the hindrances are the very things that block *jhānas*. If those hindrances are absent, really absent, then using the simile of entering into a building or into a house, the door is wide open, and there is nothing stopping or barring the person from entering into those states of absorption. That's why these things are

called hindrances, they fuel *avijjā* or delusion, and they hinder not only the passage into *jhānas* but also hinder and block wisdom. It's using that criteria which tells you whether you are ready to develop the enlightening wisdom yet, ready to look at the nature of things like the body, the mind, the sense bases, or the *khandhas*¹². All of which shows you not only whether you are ready or not to do these things, but also you see what these things really are, and how subtle they can be.

People sometimes think that they have overcome the hindrances, but they have not, because they are still too far away from entering into a *jhāna*. So that is the acid test. It is one of the reasons that I can't see why any person would stop at the entrance into a *jhāna* and say, "This is good enough, now I can contemplate; now I can find out". The usual practise, the common practise, would be to suppress the hindrances, and then having as it were the door to a *jhāna* wide open, the *jhāna* just happens. The *jhāna* sucks you in, or sucks the mind, and awareness in, and as such, it shows you that yes that is a state, were the hindrances overcome. As I told someone recently, it's a moot point whether you could stop anyway at the gate into *jhānas*.

There comes a time in the practise of *samādhi* where a snowball effect happens, when you can neither stop the process, nor can you accelerate it, but you become just an observer. And with this wonderful focussing of the mind, this wonderful abandoning of the world, that effect gets stronger and stronger, in the same way as a snowball rolling down the hill. You might be able to stop it somewhere at the top of the hill but when it gets right down to the valley it's so big, so fast, I can't see how it can be stopped. This is why we call that state *upacāra samādhi*, a state just outside of the *jhānas* where there are no hindrances. I cannot see how the mind can stop and linger with the *upacāra samādhi* that arises first. The process will pull the mind through into the *jhāna*. That is the sign telling you that was a state without hindrances. That can be seen when one emerges from that *jhāna*. Those hindrances stay knocked out for a long time. They are suppressed, as it so beautifully states in the Majjhima Nikāya, the teachings of the Buddha, which every good monk acknowledges. If a *jhāna* has not been achieved, the five hindrances, together with what you might call hindrance six and seven, discontent and the sluggishness, and stiffness of the body and the mind – sometimes called weariness and discontent –

invade the mind and remain. When the *jhāna* has been achieved these things don't invade the mind, they don't remain, and there is freedom from the hindrances.

That's the reason that classically that has been the time when deep insight happens, the insight which gives rise to the powers and the fruits. It happens because not only the five hindrances are overcome, but also because the mind can look back over those experiences. As it says in the *suttas*¹³, standing on those experiences, resting on those experiences, based on those experiences, you have the data to actually see into the nature of the mind the body, the five *khandhas*, and the sense bases. Without that data it's very hard to imagine how anyone can see the truth.

So it is important to overcome those five hindrances, and also to use the state of the *jhānas* where the hindrances are overcome, as the place where one focuses one's investigation, to be able to discover why, where, and how those states came about, and what they mean. The five hindrances are a key to this whole practise, which we call liberation of the mind.

Remember these five hindrances are not just ordinary sensory desire, ill will, restlessness and remorse, sloth and torpor, and doubt. It happens very easily that sometimes you look at your mind and think, "I've no sensory desire. I don't really want anything. I've no lust or greed. I'm not looking for a cup of tea, food, a woman, or whatever. I've got no ill will towards anybody, towards myself, or to anything. I haven't any real restlessness, or sloth and torpor. I've no real doubts. I know I'm right". That happens very often, but that's not sufficient, because you know you can't yet get into *jhānas* from that state. That's why I tell people, that when you're meditating, if there is a blockage, if you can't get further, it must be one of the five hindrances. Be methodical in the meditation practise, and so that you don't waste so much time, discover which hindrance it is, then you can identify the problem, and you can find a solution. I've got tremendous faith in the Buddha's teaching, if there were six hindrances or seven hindrances or eight hindrances the Buddha would have said so. The five hindrances, the usual list, are sufficient to describe all the obstacles between the meditator and *jhāna*. They are sufficient description, so we should look at those and investigate them.

Sensual Desire

The most hindrance important comes first, *kāma chanda*, is not just sensory desire, there are times when the English translation of these terms leaves much to be desired, and when people just follow those English translations they miss so much. I learned a lot of the Pāli from the *Vinaya*¹⁴, there these terms are given a practical explanation because they are used in life. In the Pāli term *kāma chanda*, *chanda* is what you have to do if you cannot attend a meeting of the community of monks, and you want to give approval and agreement to what's happening there, you give your *chanda* to go ahead in your absence. It's agreement, approval, consent, and it's much more subtle than mere desire. This means that you are buying into, giving in to this, you want it, you approve of it, and you allow it to happen. In the same way that we have *chanda* in the *Vinaya*, we have that *kāma chanda*. It's as if you give your approval for the sensory world to be in your consciousness, in your mind, you accept it, approve of it, and you play with it, that's all *chanda*. It's letting it completely occupy the mind, and it's much more subtle than just mere desire. The *kāma* part of *kāma chanda*, that's all that is comprised in *kāmaloka*, the world of the five senses, which goes from the hell realms, the animal realms, the ghost realms, the human realm, and the *Deva* realms, to everything that is concerned with those *kāmaloka* realms. *Kāma Chanda* is acceptance, agreement, and consent for that world to occupy you.

That's why the hindrances of *kāma chanda* are anything from the extremes of lust to just being concerned with how the body is doing. Thinking about the letter that you have to write afterwards, about the rain pattering on your roof, about your *kuṭī*¹⁵, or what needs to be built next, or where you are going to next, that's all in the *kāmaloka*, the world of the senses, that's all *kāma chanda*. It's also *kāma vitakka*, or the thoughts about those things, about family, about health, about coming here, going there, and thoughts about words.

Words are sounds, they're part of the *saddhā* or faith base, and all these things are part of *kāmaloka*, part of the five-sense world. Approving of these things is what keeps them interfering with your meditation when you are trying to watch the breath, and the feelings come up in the body, it's because you're approving of the mind going out

to the body, you're consenting to it, you're allowing it to happen. One of the great antidotes to *chanda* is *nibbidā*, this turning away, repulsion, revulsion from that world. That's why the Buddha gave some very meaningful similes for *kāmaloka*, the world of sensory desire.

I was talking the other day, about one of my favourite similes, which is the one about a bone smeared with blood that is tossed to a hungry dog. That's so apt for the sensory world, you pay attention to it, and you get a taste of comfort just for a moment, just as you scratch the itch and it just feels good for a moment. But it doesn't solve the underlying problem. In the same way when the dog gets a bone smeared with blood, it licks it and it tastes as if it's a full meal, as if it's real meat. Of course it just gets the taste, and then there is no real sustenance, there is no body to it, nothing that gives the fulfilment that it promises. It's the same with sensory desire in its grossest form in the world, whether it's sexuality, food, or whatever else you desire, it never gives you satisfaction. Don't be a person who roams the world looking for the next bone smeared with blood. You go here and you get a bone smeared with blood, "Oh that's not the right one", so you go to another monastery, and taste that and that's not the right one. You're always running around looking for the real meat, because you can't find that real meat in the sensory world, as the *suttas* say, it only leads to weariness and disappointment.

All the weariness and disappointment that comes up in your life is because one is trying to go for bones that are just smeared with blood, not the real full four course meal, which happens when you give up those things. The other simile is very fascinating, it is the simile of the man climbing a tree to get some fruit, and while he was up in the tree another guy comes along also wanting fruit, and chops the tree down. So even if it is unintentional, when you go for the sensory world, just by its very nature it is going to hurt, destroy, and bring you pain.

Last night I gave a talk about conflict in the world, basically there is no end to conflict in the world, that's what the world is about. Trying to resolve conflict in the world is impossible, to limit it is possible, but to stop it completely is impossible. As the saying is in English, 'you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear'. *Saṃsāra*¹⁶ is

like that, that's why the Buddha taught the four noble truths, the first one is *samsāra*, which is suffering. The idea is to get out of *samsāra*, out of conflict, by not getting re-born again. Once you're born you have conflict, arguments with people, conflict with the weather, conflict with the food, or the food has conflict with your stomach, there are all sorts of conflicts going on in the world. I had a stomach ache today so I know about conflict with the food in my stomach, that's par for the course. Understand that the sensory realm is dangerous, even if people have no intention to hurt, to harm, to cause you problems, or to irritate you. It's the nature of the sensory world. If you climb up into the tree sooner or later someone with no bad intention towards you, is going to cut you down and almost kill you. That's why we sometimes get angry with others or have ill will towards others, because we think that people do this on purpose. They don't do these things on purpose. It's just by being in the world. If you're up a tree sooner or if you stay up the tree long enough, someone is going to come up with a chain saw and cut you down. There are no bad intentions there it just happens. This is just the nature of the sensory world, it's dangerous.

So if you play around in that world you are going to get into trouble and that can give you *nibbidā*¹⁷. *Nibbidā* towards climbing up into that world, it gives *nibbidā* towards biting at the bones that promise you so much but give you nothing, and *nibbidā* towards the sensory world, which is not just towards the physical body. You can see it as *asubha*¹⁸; the result of *asubha* is *nibbidā*, turning away from the body. There's also the *nibbidā* towards sound, and all these things you hear from other people, praise and blame, *nibbidā* towards both. *Nibbidā* to yak, yak, yak, *nibbidā* towards the frog-mouthed owl, *nibbidā* towards the truck noise, *nibbidā* towards everything which is sound. *Nibbidā* towards sights, *nibbidā* towards smells and tastes all this food which we have, it's such a problem.

I remember Ajahn Jayasāro years ago, when he was just simple Jayasāro, said, "Wouldn't it be great if we could get some of this astronaut food". Because he had heard that it was just a few of pills you take, one for protein, one for vitamins, and one for carbohydrates. You just take the pills rather than having all these different types of food that needs to be cooked, and prepared, set out and then eaten. It would be great, wouldn't it? If we could just take pills once a day, we could have a breakfast

pill and a before-lunch pill if you wanted to. It would be great, monks taking bowls to the monks who are on retreat wouldn't have so much to carry, just a little medicine bottle, "Here's your *dāna*¹⁹ for today". It would be wonderful because it takes away all the *nibbidā*, all the problems that go with tastes. What that does is turn you away from that world, you are not concerned about it, just put food in your bowl and eat it, you see things and you just leave them alone, you turn away from all of that.

That *nibbidā*, which is revulsion from that world, is the way of turning off the five senses. Instead of having *kāma chanda* you have *kāma nibbidā*, and *kāma nibbidā* just turns you away from that world. How long have you lived in that world, and what has it ever given you? Whatever you've had from that world is just problems, all it's ever given you is old age, suffering and death. Old age, suffering and death, again and again, it gives you all sorts of problems. If I've ever given you a problem don't blame me, it's *kāma*, it's the sensory world that's given you the problem. If it's your body giving you a problem, it's *kāma* the sensory world. That's what the sensory world is. Having *nibbidā* to the sensory world is the antidote to that hindrance. Not only will it stop you indulging in thoughts about the things of the past, and indulging in the experience of the senses now, but it will also stop you from thinking about them, and making plans about them. Why do we do any planning? Because we think that we can control the world and gain happiness. That is just a hopeless task, the whole thing stinks, just throw it all away. You no need to worry about the future, because you know it's going to be bad, and it's not going to give you much happiness. It's going to be more trouble, more problems. Being an abbot I don't control anything, it would be just letting me have more troubles, more problems. Being the second monk, third monk, or junior monk is just more trouble, more problems in the sensory realm. So don't even plan or think about the future when you're meditating, have *nibbidā* towards all of that. Having *nibbidā* towards the food, you only eat because it sustains the body, it's your duty to keep the body reasonably healthy, and follow the middle way, the Buddha's way.

With *nibbidā* towards the five senses they are very easy to turn off, which means when you are meditating the feelings in the body don't come up. You become fed up with trying to get this body into a nice position – that happened to me early on in my

monastic life, I didn't know this when I was a lay meditator. As a monk meditator, I was sitting down and my legs went to sleep, I had pins and needles. Every time that happened I would move and destroy my meditation, until one day I decided I've had enough of this. I had *nibbidā* to always having to change because of my legs going to sleep. I decided right, it doesn't matter if they die, or gangrene sets in, or whatever, I'll just stay there. And to my amazement I called the bodies bluff, the blood started flowing again, and the pins and needles went by themselves. At other time's people have called the bluff of the body, they'd be sitting there with aches and pains, and they just forgot about it, and got into deep meditation, and afterwards the aches and pains aren't there any more. These aches and pains in the body, are they really aches and pains, or are they a product of the mind? With *samādhi* you can sit meditation for hours and there are no aches and pains at all. You can sit there for an hour, or an hour and a half, without *samādhi* and your body aches and is stiff, what's going on? After a while you lose confidence that the body tells the truth, you lose confidence that sight tells the truth, that the ears tell the truth, that the nose or the tongue tells the truth, you have *nibbidā* towards all of that. It means these things don't interfere with you, a sound comes up you are just not concerned, turn away from these things.

It's the same with ill will, the second hindrance that comes up. Ill will is a stupid hindrance, it's a crazy hindrance. I don't know why people actually get bothered by ill will, because what does it ever do for you. If someone upsets you, says something you don't like, does something that you don't approve of, why allow them to give you a bad day? You don't have to allow them to spoil your happiness. Even if it's your ill will towards someone else, what does having ill will towards them actually achieve? Trying for revenge, they hurt me and therefore I'm going to hurt them. You go around planning, or you make waves trying to upset them or put them down. So much of speech, especially in confrontation, is just trying to give another person a bad day, that ill will doesn't really help anybody. If someone else has done something wrong, if they really have broken their precepts, or done something inappropriate, it's their problem, its *kamma's* ²⁰ problem, *kamma* will sort everything out, you don't have to have ill will towards them.

When you really see that ill will, you see that it's wasting so much time in your life. You haven't got much time to practise this path, but now is got the best time of all, the meditation retreat, there are not many distractions for you, why waste it with the distraction of ill will? Outside the rains retreat period, when you are doing many things, there is even less time to meditate, so why waste even a second with ill will? It's craziness, I think the Buddha described it as a sickness, and with that sickness there is no way you can acquire any wisdom, happiness, or meditation concentration. So put that aside, use your insight, your intelligence, to see that ill will gets you nowhere, and just put it aside, have *nibbidā* towards it. Reflect on just how much time it's wasted for you, how it's tortured you, made you sick and weak, and then just allow it to disappear.

Ill Will and Anger

I've mentioned before in some of these talks, that ill will goes very deep, it's ill will that stops you having happiness, it doesn't allow you happiness, and it can become very aggressive. There's the story that is adapted from the Udāna, about the anger eating demon – which I'm not going into detail here because you have probably all heard it so many times – you give the demon anger or aggression, and it gets stronger. That's why to clear the defilements we slap them around a bit, but if we try that with ill will it gets even worse, it comes from a sense of 'self', it's ill will towards ill will, and it's not the way. The Buddha said *mettā*, loving-kindness, is the way to overcome that defilement, not ill will. That's why the monks on the Vaggumuda River doing an *asubha kammaṭṭhāna* got into so much ill will towards themselves that they committed suicide (Vinaya Pīṭaka, Intro to Pārājika 3). The Buddha had to say, "Monks, that's the wrong way, balance your practise". *Asubha* meditation is great for lessening, and suppressing sensory desire, but ill will needs loving-kindness, it needs the softness of the mind, and that needs to be looked at in ones meditation.

I often say that people in this monastery don't get deep in their meditation because one of the biggest blockages is ill will towards themselves, or ill will towards the meditation object, it is not because of ill will towards others. You can see that easily, what it means is that when you are meditating, when you are watching the breath say, you have ill will towards that breath, in other words you're going to conquer that

breath, you are going to use your macho power, I'm stronger than you, grab hold of it just like some bouncer at a night club, this is the way I'm going to capture the breath, and I'm going to keep it there. That aggression is ill will, and you'll find you may be able to hold the breath for a short time but because of *anicca* (impermanence), as soon as you loosen your grip the breath is going to run away. It will run fast and not come back, just the whole stress of that will never allow the mind to settle down. That's why in this meditation it is good from time to time, to do some loving-kindness meditation. I don't mean in a deep meditation by doing the "May all beings be happy", as a verbal exercise. But just remember what loving-kindness means, and bring up the mood of loving-kindness, bring it up into the mind, and soften the mind. Place that mood of loving-kindness on the breath, and so you are meditating on the breath with *mettā* (loving-kindness). *Mettā* and *ānāpānasati*²¹ come together as one, you are watching the breath so softly, and you find the breath stays there. You are not trying to grab hold of it, holding it down with force, or fighting it like a soldier. You are being compassionate like a Buddha. And with that compassion, kindness, and softness, you find it's much easier to hold the breath, and much easier to develop the deeper meditation.

I remember one time when I was starting a meditation retreat; I was so tired from all of the working, and getting to the retreat, and giving the introductory talk. And then after the talk I thought, "Okay, now is the time that I can do some meditation". It was marvellous putting *mettā* on the breath, and I had a wonderful deep meditation, even during the night I dreamt of that meditation. I got up in the morning and the *nimitta*²² was right there as soon as I woke up. It is marvellous to put loving-kindness together with the breath, and it was obvious that that evening, maybe because of tiredness, the hindrance was ill will, but I spotted it, and gave it the antidote with amazing results. So when you can see these hindrances and actually put forth the right antidote it's amazing what happens, and of course the only real way you can know if its ill will is to try *mettā*. If it works you know, 'Ah that was ill will'. After that you know ill will can truly be a very subtle hindrance, and you know only through the practice that if the antidote works, then it was ill will. I couldn't really see the ill will I had that evening, I couldn't recognize it as ill will, I just had some intuition to do the loving-kindness practise, and it worked. Sometimes the way ill will manifests, you just can't

notice it, it's almost invisible. If the meditation immediately goes deeper by the use of loving-kindness then you know that was ill will, and you can also see how this becomes a hindrance to wisdom. Some of these hindrances are so subtle they are like the invisible man, they're like ghosts, they block the way, but they are so refined and subtle you can't really see them blocking the way. But the remedies that the Buddha gave are the ones that work.

Restlessness and Remorse

When it gets to *Uddhaccakukkucca*, the restlessness of the mind, you all know this one. When you are meditating the mind goes backwards and forwards, you try to make it stop thinking, and going here and there, but it just won't settle down. It's very close to ill will, but if you look deeper you'll find that it's not ill will, it's just that the mind has got into fault finding. It's a lack of contentment, and that's why that word contentment is so powerful. If loving-kindness doesn't work just try developing contentment. Contentment says to the 'anger-eating demon', "Demon you can be here as long as you like". If the mind is running backwards and forwards, allow it to run backwards and forwards. Tell the mind, "You can run wherever you want mind, I'm completely content". That takes away the force that keeps the mind moving. What is that force? It's always discontent, wanting something else, wanting to be somewhere else, and never really wanting what's happening here and now, because you have judged it to be wrong, not good enough. The mind is wandering all over the place, and you think this is not good enough, but with contentment it's okay, so just leave it. What arises, passes away, the mind will slow down by itself.

Contentment is undermining the 'doer' and that's actually very difficult to see. When you apply contentment more and more, deeper and deeper, people find that it is an incredibly powerful tool to get you into deep *samādhī*. So when you're watching the breath, you're just content to be with this rough old breath that you're on now, absolutely content, you don't ever want anything else in the whole world. All you want is just to be here now with this rotten old breath. Try that, it is called letting go. That full contentment is like climbing on the bus, and letting everything just happen, full letting go. What happens is that the 'doer', the thing creating the problem, has been seen. "Mara, I know you, you're just discontent, fault finding. I'm not going to follow you. I'm not going to buy into you. Whatever you want to do off you go."

That tells Māra, that he's been seen, and he slinks away with shoulders hunched saying, "The monk knows me". What that metaphor means is that the disturbance slinks away with shoulders hunched; the mind settles because of contentment, there is no reason to make the mind move.

The mind settling down is like Ajahn Chah's simile of the leaf fluttering in the tree. Contentment has removed the wind of discontent, of doing, and when that wind has been removed little by little the leaf flutters less and less, the mind settles down, the breath settles down, and before you know it you're just watching the beautiful breath. You're so content to be with the beautiful breath, and that contentment becomes the inclination of the mind, it becomes established in the mind. You'll be so content that the beautiful breath just turns into a *nimitta*, but you don't care. You're just content if the *nimitta* comes or goes. However long it wants to stay, it can. You're so content you're not forcing the issue. You've let go, you're not driving the meditation. And because of that contentment the *nimitta* doesn't move, and because it doesn't move it builds up more and more energy, and you get into the first *jhāna*. Contentment keeps on working to overcome the *vitakka vicāra*²³, and then one has the full contentment of the second *jhāna*.

That's how far contentment can take you. It's a powerful antidote to the restlessness that moves the mind and makes it wobble in the first *jhāna*. That restlessness is because you are finding fault and being critical. Monks who are always critical and always finding fault, either with other people, the monastery, with this or that, should know that they will never find contentment in the world. They'll go to another monastery but they'll take the faultfinding mind with them, and so they won't be content there, even if they could find the Jeta Grove, and the Buddha was sitting there, they wouldn't be content there either. So it's just the faultfinding mind that is the opposite of contentment.

Real contentment has a feel to it, when you practise contentment a lot in the meditation, it's not just a word, it's a whole territory in the mind, and it's a territory, a place, a path, which leads to deep meditations. It's a very, very beautiful word, and the more you reflect upon it, the more you allow it to lead you, and the more you will

know how powerful it is as a path into the deep meditations. It also shows you the path of an Arahant, absolutely content.

The hindrance of *kukkucca*, remorse, is very close to the hindrance of sceptical doubt. It is remorse about things that you've done, which you shouldn't have done. You all know the way to stop that is with forgiveness. Let it go, everyone makes mistakes in this world, no one is perfect because the world isn't perfect, because *rūpa khandha*, *vedanā khandha*, *saññā khandha*, *saṅkhāra khandha* and *viññāṇa khandha*, aren't perfect. So what do you expect? Any monk or kangaroo is the same, they are not perfect, they are just *khandhas*, so forgive and let go, its par for the course.

Sloth and Torpor

Sloth and torpor is a negativity trying to escape through sleep. When I used to visit the prisons, because prisons are very unpleasant places for people to stay in, one of the common phrases was, "An hour of sleep is an hour off your sentence" but here in the monastery an hour of extra sleep is an hour of wasted opportunity. Sloth and torpor shows that you are really not enjoying what you are doing. There is no happiness in the practise. *Asubha kammaṭṭhāna* the loathsomeness of things can quite easily lead to sloth and torpor, unless you develop *asubha* to the point where it arouses *pīṭisukha*²⁴. Be careful there, if it just arouses negativity, the mind will be inclined to go into sloth and torpor.

If you enjoy meditating after a while energy just arises in the mind. Don't always look at the clock, look at the present moment instead. The clocks can create sloth and torpor. It's ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, it's my bedtime now, and you start to yawn, if you don't look at the clock who knows what time it is. Once when I was a lay person, I went to the far north of Norway in the Arctic circle, it was light nearly all day and night, in twenty-four hours it never changed much, that really confused me, I didn't know what was the right time to sleep. It would be marvellous to get all the monks to go up there for the rains retreat. You would find that you had extra energy, why sleep when it's light. You would only sleep when the body told you its really tired, not just when it's dark or just because it's your bedtime.

That's the reason why in this monastery we don't have morning and evening meetings, because I don't want you to be prisoners of the clock. I want you to be free of that, so that when the meditation is going well, go for it. And when it's time to rest, rest. Sometimes, if you push yourself too much you just get into sloth and torpor. It's much better if a person has clarity of mind, and not so much meditation than to have hardly any sleep, and have a dull mind all day. Be careful there, I've been through that myself. If you try to cut down on sleep to the point that when you get up in the morning you just nod off, or you fall asleep sitting up, that's not enough sleep. Also be careful not to have too much sleep, again you get sloth and torpor. Get the right amount of sleep, of food, of exercise, and of happiness in your life, then you don't have too much sloth and torpor. Negative people often have sloth and torpor. Those with a positive attitude have energy.

If you have sloth and torpor, bring up happiness, because happiness is energy, bring up joy in your mind; bring up an *asubha nimitta*, a happy joyful object in the mind. If you enjoy chanting, chant. If you enjoy walking, walk. If you enjoy sitting, sit. If you enjoy reading, read. I'm not talking about sensory enjoyment, so don't start thinking about women. I won't tell you who it was, but one of the monks in a monastery in Thailand did that once, he said he had no sloth and torpor, no restlessness at all. But that's not the way to overcome the hindrances; one hindrance is just being substituted by another. Do it with a wholesome object that brings happiness, and joy. *Cāgānussati* is one of my favourites, reflecting on all the sacrifices, and all the goodness that I have done. As one monk reminded me today, just reflecting on all the wonderful people who came for my birthday, and on the fact that they came, because I'd done something for them. I gave something to them, that's why they came. It was my *cāga*, generosity, and giving, which caused that. So you can reflect upon that instead of on negativity. Why is my birthday during the rains retreat? It's unfair, why can't it be some other time when we're busy anyway? Then just to have the positive attitude to reflect on that investigation, and that gives energy. I must admit that I forgot to do that, so I was negative to my birthday celebrations, but I should have done it. Isn't it wonderful that so many people come? That positive energy gives the happiness and joy to overcome sloth and torpor. So its

happiness through an *asubha nimitta*, anything that gives energy and joy, energises the mind.

Sceptical Doubt

And lastly *vicikicchā*, doubt, which is the opposite of sloth and torpor. Doubt is thinking too much. When you think too much you will always have doubts.

Wherever there's thinking it goes in two ways, the prefix *vi* it's going into a fork, doubting could it be this way or that way, it's duality. When there is no duality there's a unity of mind, and doubt cannot happen, just give yourself up to the instructions. Sometimes, doubt can come up when we contemplate the *Dhamma* rather than contemplate the path, we contemplate the goal rather than the way to the goal. The way to the goal is quite clear, everybody agrees on that, especially in our tradition, but people have differences of opinion on what you actually see when you get there.

It's a waste of time having those differences of opinion, get there first, and then see for yourself. So don't waste time having doubts about the goal, and what's going to be there, you know it will be good. The Buddha went there, and said *Nibbāna*²⁵ was a good place to go to, so follow the path, and have confidence that this is the path of the *Ariyas*²⁶. It's the path you see in the *suttas*. It's a path which leads to *Nibbāna*. It's a gradual path, which means it gradually gets better and better, with more and more power, happiness, and profundity. You have the feeling that you are getting closer and closer to something that is very amazing, very wonderful and liberating. You are getting closer and closer to what you've always wanted. The more you meditate the closer you get, and the surer you are that this is the path. *Vicikicchā* is overcome gradually, through practise, experience of what's happening, and eventually you get your first experience of a *jhāna*, and all the doubt about what you need to do is usually abandoned. You actually see what's going on with this mind and body, all doubt goes. You know what to do so there is no messing around, wobbling, faltering, or hesitation, 'This is what I've got to do, get in there and do it'.

Conclusion

These are the five hindrances to one's meditation practice. Whatever is stopping you from enjoying the deepest of meditations it has to be one of these five hindrances, or a combination of them? If it's a combination, one will be prominent, so don't mess around, know the obstacle, know the remedy, and apply it. In applying that remedy you will also be practising *dhammānussati*²⁷, the first *Satipatthāna*²⁸, getting to know what these hindrances are. The reason *dhammānussati* leads to deep insight is because these are refined forms of craving, refined forms of attachment; the five hindrances are manifestations of these things. People in the world say all sorts of stupid things about what attachment is, what craving is, here you're seeing through bare experience what these things are. You're not just reading the menu, you taste the food. You see what craving is and how pernicious it is, how difficult it is to track down. It's really slippery, but once you actually see through it that leads to the eradication of the five hindrances. Each one of these five hindrances is a manifestation of craving, once you actually see that you understand how craving is so deep, why it is so hard to uproot, and why the way to uproot it is only through the practice of the eightfold path culminating in *jhānas*.

So these are the insights you get through contemplating these five hindrances, knowing them so well that you know them completely. You know the antidotes, and you become one who – as they say in the *suttas* – can enter *jhānas* with no difficulty, no trouble, and with ease. You know the way in, the obstacles, the remedies, so why should there be any difficulty? Please bear these words in mind in the next two or three weeks. Just focus on the practice that leads to *jhāna*, and on the way you'll have some very powerful insights into the nature of craving and attachment. So bear these words in mind, and may they bear fruit in your practice.

¹ *Samādhi*: Sustained attention on one thing.

² *Sīla*: Virtue or moral conduct.

³ *Paññā*: Wisdom.

⁴ *Vinaya*: The code of monastic discipline.

⁵ Hindrances, The Five:

1. Sensual desire
2. Ill-will and anger
3. Lethargy and dullness

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4. Restless and Remorse
 5. Doubt

⁶ *Jhāna*: The deep meditation states of letting go.

⁷ *Papañca*: Proliferation, diversification or diffuseness. Also implies worldliness.

⁸ *Avijjā*: Delusion or ignorance (of the Four Noble Truths).

Noble Truths, The Four

The truth of:

1. Suffering
2. The cause of suffering
3. The cessation of suffering
4. The path leading to the cessation of suffering

⁹ *Sotāpanna*: Stream Winner, the first stage of Enlightenment. One guaranteed to attain Full Enlightenment within seven lifetimes at most.

¹⁰ *Anāgāmī*: Non Returner, one who has attained the third stage of Enlightenment

¹¹ *Arahant*: A Fully Enlightened One.

¹² *Khandhas* - Aggregates. The 5 groups into which the Buddha has summed up all the physical and mental phenomena of existence (modified from “Buddhist Dictionary”).

1. body, *rūpa*;
2. feeling, *vedanā*;
3. perception, *saññā*;
4. mental formations, *saṅkhāras*;
5. and consciousness, *viññāṇa*.

¹³ *Sutta*: Discourse of the Lord Buddha, or one of his chief disciples, as recorded in the Pāli Canon.

¹⁴ *Vinaya*: The code of monastic discipline.

¹⁵ *Kuṭī*: Monks hut or dwelling.

¹⁶ *Samsāra*: The round of rebirth (Literally: ‘wandering on’).

¹⁷ *Nibbidā*: Aversion, revulsion or wearisomeness towards (especially) the round of existence. This is a consequence of deep insight, and has nothing to do with unwholesome states.

¹⁸ *Asubha*: Not-beautiful (sometimes translated as repulsiveness, or loathsomeness). The perception of impurity, loathsomeness, and foulness. The contemplation of the 32 parts of the body.

¹⁹ *Dāna*: Generosity. Also used to describe the gifts of food and other requisites given to the monastic community.

²⁰ *Kamma*: Action, or activity created by volition

²¹ *Ānāpānasati*: Mindfulness of breathing (breath meditation).

The first Twelve Steps of *ānāpānasati*

- Step 1 – Experiencing a Long Breath
- Step 2 – Experiencing a Short Breath
- Step 3 – Experiencing the Whole of the Breath
- Step 4 – Calming the Breath
- Step 5 – Arousing Joy
- Step 6 – Arousing Happiness

Step 7 – Experiencing the Breath as a Mind-Object
Step 8 – Stabilizing the Joy and Happiness
Step 9 – Experiencing the Mind
Step 10 – Shining the *nimitta*
Step 11 – Sustaining the *nimitta*
Step 12 – Freeing the Mind

²² *Nimitta*: A sign, characteristic. In the context of Buddhist meditation, a mental sign.

²³ *Vitakka*: One of the factors of first *jhāna*. The sub-verbal movement of the mind onto bliss (*pīṭisukha*). *Vicāra*: The mind's sub-verbal holding onto the bliss.

²⁴ *Pīṭisukha*: Joy and happiness born of letting go. Factors of the first two *jhānas*.

²⁵ *Nibbāna*: Literally; “Extinction” (as in the going out of a flame). The supreme goal for Buddhists – it is the destruction of greed, hatred, and delusion – thus, the end of all suffering.

²⁶ *Ariya*: A Noble One, a person who has attained to one of the four stages of Enlightenment.

²⁷ *Dhammānussati*: Reflection or recollection of the *Dhamma*.

²⁸ *Satipaṭṭhāna*: Focuses of Mindfulness. There are four: body, feeling, mind, and mind objects.