

The Five Hindrances

kammachanda	lust or sensual desire
vyapada	ill will or aversion
thina-middha	sloth or stiffness and torpor
uddhacca-kukkucca	restlessness or agitation and worry (guilt or remorse)
vicikiccha	sceptical doubt or uncertainty

These are used in the Theravada system of meditation analysis and instruction and are termed nivarana in Pali (or pancanirvarana for five hindrances). Other translations are impediments or obstructions. They can be seen as an elaboration of the three poisons, which are craving, ill will and confusion or delusion.

In the Tibetan systems, calm abiding or samatha is obstructed by the five faults:

- laziness
- forgetfulness of the object of observation or forgetting the instruction
- laxity and excitement
- non application (of the antidotes to laxity and excitement)
- over application or application when not necessary of the antidotes.

The jhana factors are incompatible with and suppress each of the hindrances:

lust	concentration – ekaggata
ill will	bliss, rapture–piti
stiffness and torpor	applied thought – vitakka
agitation and worry	happiness–sukkha
doubt	sustained thought – vicara

The hindrances are 'eliminated' by the stages of insight or enlightenment (note that here the hindrances are broken up with worry/kukkucca being eliminated in the 3rd stage):

uncertainty	1 st stage	stream enterer	sotapatti/sottapanna
	2 nd stage	once returner	
lust, ill will, worry	3 rd stage	never returner	
stiffness & torpor, agitation	4 th stage	arahant	nibbana

There is a traditional analogy used in which the mind is like a clear forest pond in which we want to see to the depths. The hindrances cloud the mind in the following ways:

sensual desire	beautiful coloured dyes are in the water obscuring our vision
ill will	turbulence, boiling like a hot spring or rapids in a river
stiffness & torpor	algae, weeds & grass obscure the surface
agitation & worry	a wind has arisen and waves are disturbing the pond
doubt	mud has been stirred up from the bottom

Another simile

sensual desire	being in debt to others
ill will	being physically ill
stiffness and torpor	being in prison
agitation & worry	enslaved
doubt	travelling in a wilderness

Ways to Work With the Hindrances

Some general methods

The first step is to acknowledge that a hindrance (or hindrances) is actually present. It is of no use just continuing in one's meditation, trying to focus on the breath, etc and ignoring or wishing the hindrance away. The heart of our practice is deepening awareness, so we need to recognize and acknowledge each new mental state as it arises.

Then we have some 'techniques':

- Mindfulness–labelling in meditation practice.
- Cultivate the opposite state.
- Learn to let go as soon as the hindrance has arisen, before it has taken hold.
- Study dharma and associate with dharma friends–kalyana mitta.
- Get interested in the hindrance itself. Study the hindrance–see what effect it has on you in your life and in the moment in meditation. Be aware when it arises. How does it begin, what precedes it? What are its characteristics? How does it go–what do you do to help it dissolve?
- Look for how the hindrance manifests in the body. Know where in the body, the emotion or feeling of the hindrance is felt. See if you can find the smallest or originating point or location.
- With the first two hindrances, understand that the problem is not the object of the desire or aversion, but rather the energy in the mind. For instance, getting the object is not what we really or deeply want, but rather it is the end of desiring, that we are looking for. We usually relate the end of desire to getting the object rather than to just letting go.

Generally, we approach the hindrances the way all phenomena should be examined or experienced. This is to see it is not self, it is impermanent and these states are suffering and cause pain to us or to others. As such they are not to be indulged or cultivated.

Mindfulness means not clinging, not identifying and not judging self or others.

Do not condemn the hindrances, rather see them as conditioned phenomena.

The cultivation of jhana, focus and calm will move the hindrances into dormancy through the gradual strengthening of mind. Forceful repression or inhibition does not work in the long run here. Where effort is needed is to develop a stable undistracted mindfulness.

Antidotes & Some traditional approaches

The traditional Buddhist antidotes that are used to work with the hindrances, after the all-important step of recognition (self-awareness), are fourfold. They are 1) to consider the consequences of remaining in that state, 2) cultivating the opposite, 3) developing a sky-like attitude and 4) suppression (not repression & best used for weak hindrances). We'll elaborate on them next week.

sensual desire

cultivate attention to the repulsive nature of the body,
moderation in food and sleep

ill will

direct metta/lovingkindness to the object of aversion

stiffness & torpor

reduce food or get some exercise

agitation & worry

repent & resolve if this arises from an uneasy conscience

doubt

study dharma, associate with kalyana mitta

Transformations

desire

can be transformed into wanting the best for ourselves and all beings

anger, ill will

moves into energy to break through blockages in ourselves and situations

sloth & torpor

transform into calm / samatha by brightening the mind

restlessness

becomes alert energy for investigation

worry

guilt turns into remorse and resolution not to act in that way again

doubt

turns into the Great Doubt of Who Am I?, etc.

Sensual Desire

Description

This is found in all sense doors, including the mind. It pulls us out of the moment into fantasy. There is also need for confirmation of self in desire.

Remedies

Reflect on the result if I gave into every desire that arose.

Moderation in daily life. Substituting the wholesome for the unwholesome. Reflecting on our mortality, on impermanence and on the mind of greed.

Six things are conducive to the abandonment of sensual desire:

1. Learning how to meditate on impure objects; (cemetery meditation, etc.)
2. Devoting oneself to the meditation on the impure; (repulsiveness of the body)
3. Guarding the sense doors;
4. Moderation in eating;
5. Noble friendship;
6. Suitable conversation. Commentary to the Satipatthana Sutta

Aversion

Description

Aversion, ill will, hatred, judging, envy. Often in meditation it comes up related to memory, whereas desire arises from fantasy. It also can be our response to our experience in the moment.

Anger, the strong aspect of aversion, can be addicting. For some, anger brings energy into their work. Righteous anger is a reinforcement of self and is also addicting.

Boredom is also a form of aversion to the present experience.

Remedies

The classic is to use metta/lovingkindness to the person or situation. In daily life we can give the person a gift.

We can reflect on the law of karma. The other being will be the heir of their actions—this can lessen our desire for revenge and can help generate compassion. We also can think of our anger and its results as our possession. Do we really want to keep this close by and treasure it?

Sloth and Torpor

Description

The initial question to ask yourself—is this a genuine need for sleep? We are chronically sleep deprived in this culture and for meditation to be fully effective we need to catch up on our sleep. In Friends of the Heart retreats, we pay great attention to ensuring that we get enough rest at the start of retreat to help us heal.

This state can also come on as an inner resistance to investigating or feeling something unpleasant or fearful.

Meditation practice will also expose any energy imbalances in the body. Torpor or its opposite restlessness can be just a manifestation of imbalance. Sometimes as we get concentrated and still, there is not enough energy and the mind goes into a sort of a fugue state. It is a sign of strengthening concentration, that now needs attention to energy raising. This state can be very pleasant and hard to motivate meditators to avoid.

Remedies

Get plenty of sleep and keep your meditation periods shorter. Vary your practice to include standing and walking meditation. If you sit before going to bed, this may need to be a shorter sit that ends when sleepiness arrives. It is of little use to continue to meditate through genuine tiredness.

Keep the lights on in your meditation area to keep the environment light and bright. Your room should also be a little cool. Sit with your eyes open and raise your gaze a little. Wash your face with cold water or take a cold shower. Go roll in the snow.

Sit up very erect and keep your attention on the posture. The erect posture brings energy and can help transform the torpor.

Use pranayama exercises that raise energy, before the start of each sitting. Explore energy raising yoga such as the Five Tibetans or Sun Salutation or the Spinal Breathing

Use visualization of light as an energy raising technique. Tibetan instructions for laxity include visualizing a white glowing pea at the heart or third eye point.

Agitation and Worry

Description

This is an obvious one, but hard to deal with. In daily life it manifests as the need for change, excitement, boredom. Advertisers know our attention span is decreasing and sound bites, media bites are getting shorter. Kids who watch a lot of TV are finding that paying attention in school is hard. We complain that our life is scattered and chaotic, yet continue to create this very life.

In meditation, it can show in an extreme need to move, just being unable to sit still. It may be due to an energy imbalance that can show up in with meditation practice. What we need to do is learn how to transform this hindrance into alertness.

If we are not exercising enough, restlessness can be the bodies signal to go for a walk or a run, do some push-ups, etc.

Remedies

Bring your attention to the body. Look for a spot /point where the restless energy seems to arise and focus directly there. Use the strong physical sensation as concentration exercise.

Make a resolution not to move for the remainder of the sitting. As one teacher said 'Resign yourself to being the first meditator to die of restlessness'. Become friends with this energy.

Work off some of the energy in exercise. Be cautious here, as the long range purpose is understanding and transformation into the productive energy of investigation and alertness.

Keeping your environment calmer helps. Warm room, soft lights reduced distraction are all aids here.

Tibetan visualization includes holding a dark pea at the centre below the navel or outside the body in front of this point.

Doubt

Description

Here we consider everything and remain indecisive. It can manifest as we say to ourselves that this practice is 'too hard', 'I am not ready', 'it doesn't work for me'.

Remedies

Study of dharma. Read inspirational literature. Reflect. Faith can develop now only through practice, seeing and experiencing for myself.

We need to turn doubt into curiosity and investigation. Coleridge referred the attitude of mind needed for practice as 'the willing suspension of disbelief'.

We need to develop steadiness of practice, continuity and an attitude of stick-to-itness.

This little doubt can eventually be transformed into the Great Doubt of Who am I?, What is All This About?, How Do I Become Free?, etc.

Busyness (the Sixth Hindrance)

In our culture, this is a virtue or if not a virtue it is certainly part of city culture and accepted. In the Tibetan listing of faults it comes under laziness.

There are many good web resources. Here is one
[http://mahamakuta.inet.co.th/english/b-way\(9\).html](http://mahamakuta.inet.co.th/english/b-way(9).html)