

The Five Hindrances

Let's start this lecture series with a quick look at the human mind, with the intention of creating a view of the mind as the Buddhist understands it.

The dimensions, or aspects, or components of mind that most of us are familiar with are the cognitive thought processes. When we say, "I'm thinking," or "Let me consider what you are saying," or "I remember when I was a small child and went to the state fair," we're using our cognitive thought processes. These processes are what Buddhism refers to as "small mind." This small mind can do 2 things: it can remember and it can discriminate. It remembers going to the state fair when I was younger; it discriminates one line of thinking from another.

Further, this small mind is conditioned. Let's just say that at birth it's somewhat blank, though this is not totally true since the minds of newly born beings already have some conditioning in them. But generally, for

our looking today, let's just say we're born with some blank places in our small mind. Then we begin to have all kinds of experiences that fill up the blank spaces of the mind. Over time, since we're trainable creatures, we learn to react predictably in our thinking processes.

Cognitive therapy calls these learned thinking patterns "limited thinking patterns," because we ARE limited to them. They are also called distorted thinking patterns, because they distort what is actually occurring.

Here are the names of some of the limited thinking patterns that most of us have some of: worry, catastrophizing, blaming, filtering, mind reading projecting), over-generalizing, polarizing, personalizing, being right, the fallacy of fairness, emotional reasoning, and criticizing or judging.

Buddhism includes all these limited thinking patterns in what it calls 5 stumbling blocks or hindrances on the spiritual path. These 5 are:

Craving (or desiring)

Ill will

Sloth and torpor

Restlessness and worry

Doubt

Let's remind ourselves, too, that Buddhism pre-supposes that, before conditioning, each mind is inherently clear, open, bright, all-pervasive, easily adaptable, and highly flexible. But through our experiences, the mind becomes programmed, conditioned, rigid and fixed, and learns to react to given circumstances in set ways or patterns.

Each hindrance obstructs our sight – our VIEW – and prevents us from seeing things as they really truly are. Anais Nin says, “We don't see things as they are; we see them AS WE ARE.”

These hindrances stand between you and the clear awareness of enlightenment. Each hindrance is a fundamental activity of an unenlightened mind.

(Drop dye in glass of clear water.)

(Hand out colored plastic to look through.)

Now let's look just at Doubt as a hindrance on the Path. What does a doubting mind look like? What self-talk is occurring in a doubting mind? Here are just a few of the kinds of statements the doubting mind is programmed to say: I'll never be enlightened. I'll never sit still enough to deepen my practice. Nancy is a fool. She doesn't know what she's talking about. I know she's given me the wrong meditation technique. Karma is crap. That death bardo teaching must have been the bad trip of someone on hallucinogenics. Buddhism is psycho-babble. Can this Path deliver what it promises? Do I really need to meditate every day?

These are some of the expressions of the doubting mind. It conjures up evidence that proves Gotama Buddha and other teachers wrong. It conjures up standards of perfection and judges me incapable of reaching them. We fall into states of uncertainty; we decide that we are undecided. When we hear a new aspect of the Dharma, we disbelieve it and we distrust the person who offers it. We hear this self-talk in our own heads and we just stop whatever we were doing. We don't remember to inquire into this doubt itself. We forget to doubt the doubt. We don't see that we can unmask this cynicism and, in doing so, uncover the fear, despair, hopelessness, and tired conditioning it springs from.

Buddhism asks us to put forth 'Noble Doubt,' the kind of doubt that is an integral part of the path to enlightenment. Instead of doubting the teachings (that is, doubting outward) that have endured these 2600 years, leading many men and women to end their suffering and to awaken, let's doubt our doubt (doubt inward): our own ignorance, our own assumptions that we understand everything already; let's doubt our

grasping and evasions. This is the noble doubt that spurs us on, inspires us, tests us, makes us more and more authentic, empowers us and draws us more and more within the energy field of the truth. Let's question ourselves continually and deeply enough until when that clear answer comes, it rings so strongly and purely in our heart that we respond with shocking recognition and tear-producing gratitude. And we settle into a conviction no world of doubters could ever destroy.

Well and good, you say. I'm ready to be free of this doubting mind.

How do I do this?

The answer to this question will be pretty much the same for each of the 5 Hindrances.

Step 1: Recognize your doubting mind. Know it personally. How does this mind doubt? How does it distrust? How do I talk to myself (and maybe others) when I am being skeptical, when I am not believing, and when I am invalidating?

Step 2: Acknowledge this doubting to yourself and, if possible, to others. Something like: “Wow! I see my mind is doubting, invalidating, etc.”

Step 3: Watch your doubting mind as you shift most of your attention back to your meditation technique. Fixing your mind on your meditation technique suppresses the hindrance, and establishes mindfulness and accesses concentration. In this step you are becoming the observer, the watcher of the doubting mind. In InnerVision work, we call this dis-identifying.

Step 4. Put the issue on the back burner. Honestly admit that you are not sure, but you are willing to be open and to look.

Step 5. Engender goodwill and loving kindness. Memorize the Daily Recitation and the Metta Prayer. Begin reciting these when your mind turns to doubt.

For anyone’s meditation practice to bear fruit, there are 3 prerequisites:

~To know our own dukkha – where it comes from and how it manifests in our life.

~To gain confidence in the teachings, to realize that we can actually take this path.

~To experience joy or gratitude at the opportunity we have been given.

Step 6. Use your arising doubt as a propellant to fuel your spiritual practice. Meditate just on doubt. Take your doubts to Dokusan. Read and study the Dharma.

Step 7. Do not confuse doubt with investigation and inquiry. It is very important that you find your own relationship to what is being taught on this spiritual path.

Ill-Will

First think of some one or situation you're currently dealing with where you feel offended or hurt – perhaps confused. Now just for a moment, let your mind talk on about this person or situation, listing the offences and hurts you've experienced.

Now see if you can bring up an image of this person/situation, and simply surround this image with warm, soft light. Use your breathing to send this light, and see it flooding around the person/situation.

Ill will is also called negativity or enmity. Now here's a great word – enmity. Deep-seated hatred, as between rivals or opponents; antagonism. Hostility, animosity, rancor.

Ill will arises from our repulsive reactions to something, from our frustrations, and from unpleasant sensations. Of course there are plenty of people and situations that can bring up our crankiness and irritability – like being lied to, cheated, stolen from, or hurt by a friend.

And the dharma doesn't say repress or deny our anger – it's bottling it up that creates ill – and ill will. The Dharma says stay current with each arising emotion, experience it and release its energy moment by moment.

Illness is the simile given by the Buddha for ill will and hatred. With anger, we feel hot, agitated, perhaps overwhelmed. With hatred, it's like we have a bilious disease – we all know that sour taste of bile in our stomachs.

Internal source of ill will is self-hate – self-criticism and self-dislike.

External source of ill will is harboring feelings towards others – people or situations.

Ill will arises from our unwholesome roots – remember these? Greed, anger and delusion. We're deluded that there is a separate self that we must protect, support, and satisfy its needs. Because of this delusion, we experience greed when we want something, and anger or hatred when we don't get it.

Look at the situation you thought of when we began. What was it you wanted and didn't get?

What to do when finding your mind filled with ill will: begin using a metta verse – bring up compassion and loving kindness within yourself.

Say the Daily Recitation.