

The Five Hindrances

Practices for First Month

Practicing with the hindrances is an important way to develop ones' mindfulness practice. Having understanding and freedom from the hindrances is an aspect of maturity along the Buddhist path. The following exercises are offered to help give some direction to your exploration of the hindrance of desire. These practices can be done both in meditation and in daily life.

Oct 10-16 – Being a Naturalist of Desire

During this week, look for opportunities to study your desire. Spend time noticing what affect desire has on your body, your mind, and your ability to pay attention. What parts of your body are activated? What kind of tension or stress comes with having desire? What mental states or moods tend to produce desire? How might desire prevent you from accurately seeing the object of desire?

Oct 17-23 – Cultivating Contentment

Actively develop contentment and appreciation for what you already have. Contentment is not just a way of evaluating or thinking about our lives. It also involves a relaxation of our body so that we are more settled here and now. See if you can find a way to rest within your body that supports contentment. Notice how contentment affects your desires.

Oct 24-30 – Riding out a Desire

During this week notice your stronger desires for sensual pleasure. Remember that mental pleasure is also a form of sensual pleasure. Some typical forms of sensual desire are desires related to food and drinks, sexuality, comfort, entertainment, exercise. Once you have noticed the desire, don't act on it or distract yourself from it. Rather bring mindfulness to what happens to the desire. Stay mindful of it until it is no longer present. How strong is the impulse to satisfy the desire? How does it change? What beliefs and justifications might come along with the desire? How long does it last? How do you feel once the desire has passed?

Oct 31-Nov 1 – Safeguarding the Sense Doors

One way to avoid getting caught up in desire is to safeguard oneself at the sense doors. This means two things: 1) To limit what we see, hear, or experience so these things don't trigger or reinforce our desires for them; and 2) To be attentive to sights, sounds and experiences at the moment we perceive them and then leave them alone – don't let the mind get pulled into desire for these things. During this week practice both forms of safeguarding. This practice is often more effective if you have a clear sense of the advantage of not being pulled into the world of desire.

Dharma Practice Days

The Five Hindrances

Sensual Desire, Ill Will, Sloth and Torpor, Restlessness and Worry, and Doubt.

Reflections #1

Observing yourself, please reflect on the following questions. It might be useful to spend several days on one of these sets of questions before moving on to the next. Please spend some time discussing your observations and reflections with others.

1. Which of the five hindrances is the strongest or most common for you? Which is most likely to effect your meditation? Which is most likely to influence your behavior in daily life?
2. In both meditation and daily life, how, and on which occasions, do the hindrances usually arise in you? What are the common conditions for their arising?
3. In your own meditation and life, please notice what disadvantages you experience when the hindrances are operating. What effect does recognizing the disadvantages have on you?
4. What understandings, abilities, states of mind, and practices do you know that can best help free you from the grip of the hindrances? You might draw up a list and then consider which are strongest for you.
5. Notice what opportunities you have in your daily life to develop these understandings, abilities, states of mind, and practices. What hinders your ability to act on these opportunities? What supports your ability to do so?

The Five Hindrances: The Weakeners of Wisdom (*Nivarana*)

1. Sensual desire (*kamacchanda*),
2. Ill-will (*byapada*),
3. Sloth and torpor (*thina-middha*),
4. Restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*),
5. Skeptical doubt (*vicikiccha*).

The River Analogy

Sensual desire is a hindrance & obstruction that overcomes awareness & weakens discernment. Ill will... Sloth & drowsiness... Restlessness & anxiety... Uncertainty is a hindrance & obstruction that overcomes awareness & weakens discernment.

Suppose there were a river, flowing down from the mountains, going far, its current swift, carrying everything with it: If a person were to open watercourses leading off from both sides, the current in the middle of the river would be interrupted, diverted, & dispersed. The river would not go far, its current would not be swift, and it would not carry everything with it. In the same way, **if practitioners have not rid themselves of these five hindrances... there is no possibility that they can know what is for their own benefit, or the benefit of others, or both, or that he should come to realize a superior human attainment, a truly noble knowledge & vision...**

But suppose there were a river, flowing down from the mountains, going far, its current swift, carrying everything with it: If a person were to close off the watercourses leading off from both sides, the current in the middle of the river would not be interrupted, diverted, or dispersed. The river would go far, its current swift, carrying everything with it. In the same way, **if practitioners have rid themselves of these five hindrances... there is the possibility that they can know what is for their own benefit, or the benefit of others, or both, and that he should come to realize a superior human attainment, a truly noble knowledge & vision.**

Anguttara Nikaya 5.51

The Gold Analogy

When gold is corrupted by these five impurities, it is not pliant, malleable, or luminous. It is brittle or ready to be worked. Which five? Iron, copper, tin, lead, & silver. But when gold is not corrupted by these impurities, it is pliant, malleable, & luminous. Not brittle, it is ready to be worked. Then whatever sort of ornament one has in mind — whether a belt, an earring, a necklace, or a gold chain — it would serve one's purpose.

In the same way, when the mind is corrupted by these five impurities, it is not pliant, malleable, or luminous. It is brittle and not rightly concentrated for the ending of attachments. Which five? Sensual desire, ill will, sloth & drowsiness, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty. But when the mind is not corrupted by these five impurities, it is pliant, malleable, & luminous. It is not brittle and is rightly concentrated for the ending of attachments.

Anguttara Nikaya 5.23

The Water Analogy

Imagine a bowl of water mixed with red, yellow, indigo, or orange coloring, such that a person with good eyesight would not be able to see his or her face reflected accurately in the water. In the same way, when one's awareness is possessed by *sensual desire*, overcome with sensual passion, and neither knows nor sees the escape, as it has come to be, from sensual passion once it has arisen, ***then one neither knows nor sees what is for one's own benefit, or for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both...***

Now imagine a bowl of water heated on a fire, boiling & bubbling over, such that a person with good eyesight would not be able to see his or her face reflected accurately in the water. In the same way, when one's awareness is possessed by *ill will*, overcome with ill will, and neither knows nor sees the escape, as it has come to be, from ill will once it has arisen, ***then one neither knows nor sees what is for one's own benefit, or for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both...***

Now imagine a bowl of water covered with algae & slime, such that a person with good eyesight would not be able to see his or her face reflected accurately in the water. In the same way, when one remains with awareness possessed by sloth & drowsiness, overcome with sloth & drowsiness, and neither knows nor sees the escape, as it has come to be, from sloth & drowsiness once it has arisen, ***then one neither knows nor sees what is for one's own benefit, or for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both...***

Now imagine a bowl of water ruffled by the wind, disturbed, & covered with waves, such that a person with good eyesight would not be able to see his or her face reflected accurately in the water. In the same way, when one remains with awareness possessed by *restlessness & anxiety*, overcome with restlessness & anxiety, and neither knows nor sees the escape, as it has come to be, from restlessness & anxiety once it has arisen, ***then one neither knows nor sees what is for one's own benefit, or for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both...***

Now imagine a bowl of water stirred up, turbid, muddied, & left in the dark, such that a man with good eyesight would not be able to see his or her face reflected accurately in the water. In the same way, when one remains with awareness possessed by *uncertainty*, overcome with uncertainty, and neither knows nor sees the escape, as it has come to be, from uncertainty once it has arisen, ***then one neither knows nor sees what is for one's own benefit, or for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both...***

Samyuta Nikaya 46.55

The Analogy of Debt, Sickness, Prison, Slavery and Wilderness

Just as when a person taking a loan, engages in a trade, and succeeds, in the trade, he or she now not only disposes of old **debts** but also, beyond that, has a surplus for maintaining a family. And at that he or she rejoices, is glad at heart...

Just as when a person is **sick** and in pain, suffering from a grave disease, with no strength left in his body. But some time later the person recovers from that sickness and regains strength. And at that he or she rejoices, is glad at heart...

Just as when a person has been thrown into **prison**, but some time later, being released from prison, is safe, without fears. And at that he or she rejoices, is glad at heart...

Just as when a person is a **slave**, not independent, but dependent on others, unable to go where he or she likes, but then is set free from slavery, becomes independent, no longer dependent on others. And at that he or she rejoices, is glad at heart...

Just as when a person, rich and prosperous, travels through a **wilderness** where there is no food and much danger, but then has managed to cross the desert and gradually reached safely the vicinity of a village, a place of safety, free from danger. And at that he or she rejoices, is glad at heart.:

Similarly, so long as these five hindrances are not abandoned, a person is indebted, ailing, imprisoned, enslaved, traveling in a wilderness.

But when these five hindrances are abandoned, one is free from debt, rid of illness, emancipated from the prison's bondage, as a free person, and as one arrived at a place of safety.

And when one sees oneself free of these five hindrances, joy arises; in one who is joyful, rapture arises; in one whose mind is enraptured, the body is stilled; the body being stilled, one feels happiness; and a happy mind finds concentration.

The Long Discourses 2

The Hindrance of Sensual Desire Quotes

Not even with a shower of gold coins would we find satisfaction in sensual cravings.

Knowing that sensual cravings are suffering, that they bring little delight,
The sage does not rejoice even in divine pleasures.

One who delights in the ending of craving is a disciple of the Awakened One.
(Dhammapada 186-187)

To foster **inappropriate attention** to the sign of beauty is the food for the arising of sensual desire that has not yet arisen, or for the growth & increase of sensual desire once it has arisen.

To foster **appropriate attention** to the sign of unattractiveness deprives food for the arising of sensual pleasure that has not yet arisen, and for the growth & increase of sensual desire once it has arisen.

Samyutta Nikaya XLVI.51

By frequently giving attention to things that are a basis for sensual lust, unarisen sensual desire arises and arisen sensual desire increases and expands.

Samyutta Nikaya XLVI 23.

“How, monks, does a monk abide observing dharmas with reference to the five hindrances?

“Here, monks, when **sensual desire** is present within him, a monk knows,
‘Sensual desire is present within me.’

When no sensual desire is present within him, a monk knows, ‘No sensual desire is present within me.’

He knows how sensual desire that has not yet arisen, comes to arise.

He knows how sensual desire, once it has arisen, can be abandoned.

He knows how an abandoned sensual desire does not arise in the future.

Discourse on the Application of Mindfulness (MN 10)

Six things are conducive to the abandonment of sensual desire:

1. Learning how to meditate on non-attractive themes
2. Devoting oneself to the meditation on the non-attractive;
3. Safe-guarding oneself at the sense doors;
4. Moderation in eating;
5. Noble friendship;
6. Suitable conversation.

— Commentary to the Satipatthana Sutta

The Five Hindrances

Practices for the Second Month

Practicing with the hindrances is an important way to develop one's mindfulness practice. Having understanding and freedom from the hindrances is an aspect of maturity along the Buddhist path. The following exercises are offered to help give some direction to your exploration of the hindrance of desire. These practices can be done both in meditation and in daily life.

November 8 – 14: Relaxing through the Senses

Relaxation promotes health and healing. It is also important for developing mindfulness practice. Enjoying sense experience can be one way to relax. As you go about your days, please look for simple sense experiences that you can enjoy more than you usually allow yourself. It can be the sensuality of the water as you wash dishes or take a shower, or the smells of your food or drinks, or the color of someone's clothes. Explore how you can enjoy a sunset, a garden, natural beauty, music, food, etc, so that it is relaxing. How is it beneficial for you to relax with the pleasures of the senses? Are there healthy forms of sense pleasure it would be useful for you to cultivate? What is it like to experience the more refined sources of sense pleasure, e.g., refined music or art?

November 15 – 21: Mindfulness at the Sense Doors

For mindfulness practice, anything can be the focus of mindful attention. During this week, spend some time meditating on sense pleasures you can experience. It might be interesting to spend one day on each of the five physical senses. For example, spend 15 minutes focusing mindfulness on pleasant sounds. On a different other day spend time focused on something that is visually pleasant. As you stay mindful of sense pleasures stay with the physical experience, whenever your mind wanders in thought, bring it back to the pleasure. Try to experience the sense pleasure with your whole body. If possible, let the pleasure help focus and relax you.

November 22 – 28 Mindful Eating

While eating is a daily sense experience, it is common for people to be unaware of what motivates their eating. During this week, eat at least one meal a day more mindfully than usual. In particular, pause before you pick up each new bite of food. In that pause study the nature of your desire for the food. Is it a desire to alleviate physical hunger or are there other desires operating, e.g., the desire for pleasure, for comfort, for distraction. How strong is the desire for food? What do you notice if you pause to experience the desire instead of acting on it? How much of your usual eating could be called mindless or compulsive? What does it take for you to avoid succumbing to compulsion and temptation around food? What might you learn about the hindrance of sensual desire by studying your desire for food?

November 29 – December 5: Finding the Roots of Desire

Often, the desire for sensual pleasure is a surface manifestation of desiring something else. So, for example, we might want food, but the real desire is the idea that the food will make us feel better when we are depressed. On the surface, we might want alcohol, while deeper within we may want the lack of inhibition alcohol provides. Sexual desire is notorious for sometimes being the flaming tip of an iceberg of other desires. It is sometimes claimed that the root of all desires is addiction to the mind and thoughts. Many times it is not the object of desire we want, it is the ideas we have about the desired objects. The desire for beautiful and pleasing clothes may actually represent a deeper attachment to a self-image we think the clothes may provide. During this week do whatever you can to discover the root desires that may be the cause and fuel for your sense desires.

December 6 – 12: Watching Desire within a Sky-like Mind

When desires arise in meditation, try to open your awareness up so that the desire is held in a spacious, sky-like, awareness. Let the desire be like a cloud within the clear blue sky. Neither let go of the desire nor get involved in it. Rather, allow it to be within a watching awareness. This can be a challenging exercise in finding a relaxed, non-reactive observation that doesn't "do" anything with the desire. Don't investigate or give any special attention to the desire beyond watching it in a spacious manner. Notice what happens to the desire as you do this. Also, notice how you feel those times that desire floats free of your involvement with it. [If this practice doesn't make sense to you, try instead to sit as still as possible in the presence of desire. Don't act on it in any way except get as still as you can in the midst of the desire.]

December 13 – 19: Letting Go of Sense Desire

Look for opportunities to let go of sense desires. As if letting go is a muscle, spend the week strengthening that muscle. Notice what makes letting go difficult. Do you have beliefs that make you resistant to letting go? Physically, emotionally and mentally how do you feel after you have let go. If you don't somehow feel good after letting go, perhaps you have not let go thoroughly enough. Explore more deeply to find the roots of the sense desire. Try letting go of these root desires.

Dharma Practice Days

Reflections #2

The Hindrance of Sensual Desire

Please spend some time contemplating these questions. It might be useful to spend several days on one of these sets of questions before moving on to the next. Also, spend some time discussing your reflections with others.

1. What role does sense pleasure have in your life? How much are you oriented toward sense experiences? How much of your day is spent in pursuit of sense pleasure? What daily activities do you do that are influenced by the desire for sense pleasure? For example, in cooking a meal, how much of the preparation time is devoted to enhancing the sense pleasure of the food? Among the things you buy, how much of the expense results directly from the greater sense pleasure the object brings?
2. What affect does the experience of sense pleasure have on you? When and what kinds of sense pleasure are more satisfying and less satisfying for you? What forms of sense pleasures bring you the most feelings of well-being?
3. Physically, emotionally, and mentally, how do your experiences of actual sense pleasure differ from your experiences of *desiring* sense pleasure?
4. What role does the *desire* for sense pleasure have in your life? How strongly does such sense desire operate for you? How free are you from acting on desires for sense pleasure? How often do you regret some of your pursuits of sense pleasure? What have been some of the more unfortunate consequences resulting from your pursuit of sense pleasures?
5. What experiences do you have that are more satisfying than sense pleasures? What meaningful or satisfying feelings do you experience that are not connected to sense pleasure? How can you nourish these feelings? How does the presence of these feelings affect your desires for sense pleasure?

The Hindrance of Sensual Desire Quotes

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The sage does not rejoice even in divine pleasures.

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5. Noble friendship;
6. Suitable conversation.

— Commentary to the Satipatthana Sutta

The Five Hindrances

Practices for the Third Month

Practicing with the hindrances is an important way to develop ones' mindfulness practice. Having understanding and freedom from the hindrances is an aspect of maturity along the Buddhist path. The following exercises are offered to help give some direction to your exploration of the hindrance of ill-will. These practices can be done both in meditation and in daily life.

December 19-26: Loving Kindness

The Buddha taught that loving-kindness was the primary antidote to ill-will. During this week, practice loving-kindness every day. Please do this during some of your daily meditation time as well as interspersed in your daily life. As you do this, notice what effect the presence and absence of kindness has on the arising of ill-will and aversion. Are you less likely to feel aversion? Is the aversion less strong or compelling? How does the presence of loving-kindness affect how you react compared to the presence of aversion?

December 27-January 2: Mindfulness of Aversion

For mindfulness practice, anything can be the focus of mindful attention. During this week, spend some time meditating on any aversions that might arise for you. These might be quite small movements of aversion or major outbursts. In situations where it is ok to do so, allow the aversion to be present without judging it, acting on it, or abandoning it. Notice carefully how aversion feels physically. Notice how it affects the quality of your mind and thinking. How does it affect your attitude? Notice the variety of ways that the aversion is unpleasant. Is aversion ever pleasant or enjoyable? How much energy do you expend in thinking when you are being aversive?

January 3-10: Your Relationship to Aversion

During this week, look for a range of situations in which you can study your relationship to aversion and ill-will. Do you have aversion to aversion? Are you strongly pulled into aversion? Is there some way in which you enjoy or value being aversive? What attracts you to aversion and ill-will? What are some of the beliefs that fuel your tendencies towards aversion? What are you trying to accomplish by being aversive? Spend sometime talking to someone about what you discover.

January 11-18: Finding the Roots of Ill-will and Aversion

Often enough the aversion is a surface manifestation of something else. So, for example, it might arise from

1. frustrated desire
2. being afraid
3. being hurt or uncomfortable
4. feeling powerless or helpless
5. conflict, inner or outer
6. learned behavior, perhaps from childhood

During this week, please study what lies behind your aversion. Are any of these roots the trigger or the fuel for your aversion? What happens to the aversion when you focus on its underlying condition?

January 19-26: Letting Go of Aversion

Look for opportunities to let go of aversions. As if letting go is a muscle, spend the week strengthening that muscle. Notice what makes letting go of aversion difficult. Do you have beliefs that make you resistant to letting go? Physically, emotionally and mentally how do you feel after you have let go. If you don't somehow feel lighter after letting go, perhaps you have not let go thoroughly enough. Explore more deeply to find the roots of the aversion and, if you identify them, let go of these.

Dharma Practice Days

Reflections #3

The Hindrance of Ill-will

Please spend some time contemplating these questions. It might be useful to spend several days on one of these sets of questions before moving on to the next. Also, spend some time discussing your reflections with others.

1. What role does ill-will and aversion have in your life? How much of your time and thinking is involved in ill-will and aversion? What are the daily activities that most frequently lead to being aversive? What do you regularly avoid doing or encountering because of your aversion? How often are you avoiding things because of aversion?
2. Physically, emotionally, and mentally, how is the experience of ill-will different than your experiences of unpleasantness? How is the experience of ill-will or aversion different than experiences of displeasure or disapproval?
3. What are some of the unfortunate consequences of having acted on your ill-will and aversion? What cost do you pay for your aversion? How does it harm your mental, emotional, physical and social life?
4. What beliefs do you have that support your aversion? What do you believe about yourself, about others, or about what you can expect or want that tends to result in aversion? How can you question the authority of these beliefs?

The Hindrance of Ill-will Quotes

All the Buddhas of the past attained supreme awakening by abandoning **the five hindrances** of the mind that weaken understanding, firmly establishing **the four foundations of mindfulness**, and realizing the **seven factors of awakening**.

Long Discourses 16.1.17

When one sees the five hindrances are abandoned in oneself, gladness is born and from gladness in his mind, one's body becomes tranquil.

Long Discourses 1.75

Byāpāda – ill-will, malevolence (Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary)

Weeds are the ruin of fields; Ill-will is the ruin of people.
(Dhammapada 357)

1. “One has a mind of ill-will and intentions of hate thus: ‘May these beings be slain and slaughtered, may they be cut off, perish, or be annihilated.’ ...

“One's mind is without ill-will and one has intentions free of hate thus: ‘May these beings be free from enmity, affliction, and anxiety! May they live happily!’”

Middle Length Discourses 41.10 & 14

2. “I know of nothing other than distasteful things that give rise to unarisen ill-will and that strengthens arisen ill-will. This is because when someone attends improperly to a distasteful thing, unarisen ill-will arises and arisen ill-will is strengthened. ...

“I know of nothing other than the liberation of heart by loving-kindness that prevents the arising of unarisen ill-will and that abandons arisen ill-will. This is because when someone attends properly to a distasteful thing, unarisen ill-will does not arise and arisen ill-will is abandoned.”

The Numerical Discourses I, ii.1-10

3. “When **ill-will** is present within, one knows, ‘Ill-will is present within me.’
When no ill-will is present within, one knows, ‘No ill-will is present within me.’
One knows **how** ill-will that has not yet arisen, **comes to arise**.
One knows **how** ill-will, once it has arisen, can be **abandoned**.
One knows **how** an abandoned ill-will **does not arise in the future**.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (MN 10.36)

The Five Hindrances – Aversion Practices and Reflections for the Fourth Month

It is not enough to understand what the hindrances are. One must understand how they operate and how they are overcome in one's own life. Each person will have his or her own unique expressions of the hindrances. In each of the following weeks please spend time with the reflection and practice for that week. The reflections are meant for repeated reflections over the course of the week. It would be helpful if you also discussed your reflections with someone else.

Suggested reading: "Working with Anger" found on the article page of IMC's website (<http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/articles/anger.html>)

January 23 – 29: Anger

Reflection: Review your personal history with anger. As you were growing up what beliefs and behaviors did you learn about anger from your family, friends, and culture? What have been some of your significant experiences of being angry? of withholding anger? of receiving anger from others? What have you learned about anger over your lifetime? As you have become older have you become less or more prone to experiencing anger? What do you think are the reasons for this?

Practice: During the week look for situations in which you get angry, irritated, or annoyed. In these situations explore how the anger is affecting your breathing. Once you notice how your breathing is, spend a couple of minutes focusing on relaxing your breathing. What happens to the anger as you relax your breathing?

January 30 – February 5: Strength

Reflection: Review your personal history with your own personal sense of strength or power. When have you – in whatever degree – felt strong or powerful? When have you felt the absence of inner strength? In what ways have you felt comfortable with personal strength and power? In what ways have you been uncomfortable about these? What ways might you have to tap into some form of inner strength? How is strength helpful for meditation?

Practice: During meditation and a few other daily activities try to tap into or evoke a sense of personal, inner strength. Bring a greater sense of strength, power, resolve or confident energy to meditating and doing these daily activities. This might be done through being more grounded in your body or through bringing more of your body into the activity. Within the range of your normal postures, spend more time in postures that embody strength than ones that don't. For example, sitting up straighter in a couch may bring more strength than slouching on the couch. How are you affected by bringing a greater sense of strength to what you do? What connection might you notice between your sense of strength and anger?

February 6 – 12: Hostility and Anger

Reflection: Either while feeling angry, annoyed, or irritated or later in the day reflect on whether or not there was any hostility in these feelings. Do you sometimes experience anger without any hostility or ill-will? If so, how is anger with hostility different than anger without hostility? How does the presence or absence of hostility affect your relationship to anger you are having?

Practice: Look for an opportunity when you can meditate while angry. If you have such an opportunity, don't try to get rid of the anger. Also, don't fixate on the reason why you're angry. Rather, explore the present-moment experience of anger. How does it express itself in the body? What parts of your body are energized by the anger? What parts of your body are desensitized? What other emotions may be accompanying the anger? What is your thinking process like when you are angry? What are the motivations that come with the anger? What is unpleasant about the anger? What is pleasant? In the service of seeing more clearly, be as allowing of these sensations, feelings and thought-formations as possible.

February 13 – 19: Avoiding Ill-will and Anger

Reflection: When you are not angry or have no ill-will, what can you do to reduce the chance that these will occur to you? What conditions can you create so that you are less likely to get angry or aversive toward challenges you encounter? How can you best prepare yourself so you can avoid getting angry in situations that normally would provoke it? Ask some of your friends what healthy means they have of avoiding becoming aversive or angry

Practice: During meditation and daily life, actively cultivate calmness. Whenever you notice tension, relax as much as possible. Give yourself extra time to do things so that you are not rushed. As a way of being calmer, cultivate a greater sense of contentment with what is. Notice what influence being calm has on the emergence of ill-will and anger.

February 20 - 26: Letting Go of Aversion (repeated from last month)

Reflection: What beliefs do you have that support your aversion? What do you believe about yourself, about others, or about what you can expect or want that tends to result in aversion? How can you question the authority of these beliefs?

Practice: Look for opportunities to let go of aversion and anger. As if letting go is a muscle, spend the week strengthening that muscle. Notice what makes letting go of aversion difficult. Do you have beliefs that make you resistant to letting go? Physically, emotionally and mentally how do you feel after you have let go? If you don't somehow feel lighter after letting go, perhaps you have not let go thoroughly enough. Explore more deeply to find the roots of the aversion and if you identify them let go of these.

The Five Hindrances – Sloth and Torpor Practices and Reflections

In each of the following weeks repeatedly spend time with the reflection and practice for that week. It would be helpful if you also discussed your reflections with others.

Suggested reading: Article on Sloth and Torpor found on the article page of IMC's website (<http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/articles/SlothAndTorpor.html>).

February 27-March 6 – Energy

From time to time someone devoted to the higher training should give attention to three things: concentration, energetic effort, and equanimity. In giving regular attention to each of these, then one's mind will become pliant, workable, lucid, and wildy, and it will be well concentrated to overcome the taints.

The Buddha in Anguttara Nikaya III.42

Reflection: During this week, please give attention to your energy and effort. What role does energy play in your life? Do you think of yourself more as an energetic person or a non-energetic one? Are you comfortable with being energetic? When during a day or during a week are you most energized? When least? At the end of each day reflect over the day and consider which activities gave you energy and vitality? How do you get re-energized? Is it through rest or is it through activity?

Practice: Spend more time than you normally would doing things which satisfyingly energize or rejuvenate you. What gives it the satisfying feeling? How does doing this affect your mood and mental state through the rest of the day?

March 7 – 13 - Losing Energy

Reflection: Besides natural tiredness at the end of the day, what are some of the primary ways you get drained of energy and vitality? What activities do this? What kinds of thinking, beliefs, or judgments do this? How often does disappointment, frustration, or boredom drain your energy? Do you get tired or drained from being over-energized or over-busy?

Practice: Chronically worrying is an effective way of getting fatigued. During this week diligently notice when you start worrying. Focus on relaxing or letting go of whatever worry you can – be content if this is only small worries. Work on making this week as worry-free as you can. Notice how this affects your energy level throughout the day.

March 14-20 – Sleep and Fatigue

If a person eats until the stomach is stuffed and indulges in the pleasures of sleeping, lolling, and drowsing, then his or her mind will not incline to ardor, devotion, perseverance, and determination. This is a shackle of the heart.

Middle Length Discourses 16.11

Reflection: Getting too little and too much sleep can have a big influence on fatigue. Please consider your beliefs, attitudes, and practices around sleep. Do you regularly sleep less than

you need? Do you often sleep more? How restful is your sleep? How frequently do you use caffeine to overcome sleepiness? What attachments do you have that interfere with getting the proper amount of sleep?

Practices: During this week do everything you can to get plenty of sleep. Go to bed early and get up later in the morning. In the middle of the day take a ten or fifteen minute nap. Notice how getting more sleep affects your energy, alertness, and mood. In what ways is it beneficial for you to sleep more?

If you are attached to sleep and sleep too much, use this week to reduce the amount of sleep you get. Notice what benefits this provides you.

March 21-27 – Purpose, Resolve and Meaning

A certain monk approached his preceptor and said: “Venerable sir, now my body is out of control, the directions are not clearly visible to me. The Teaching does not occur to me. My mind is overcome by sloth and torpor. I lead the holy life discontented and I have doubts about the Teaching.”

(Anguttara Nikaya 5.6.6)

Reflection: Lack of meaning, purpose, and hope can lead to indifference, discouragement, and lethargy, which in turn can be a cause for sloth and torpor. Please consider how having or not having meaning and purpose affects you and your motivation to apply effort in meditation practice. What are some helpful purposes you can have that can energize your practice? What reflections could help you overcome laziness or boredom?

Practices: Spend ten minutes each day reflecting on what is your deepest intention or aspiration. Include in this reflection a consideration of how motivated you are to act on this intention. How effective do you believe you can be in following through on this intention. How is meditation practice supportive to your deepest intention? If you do this reflection before meditating, how is your meditation affected?

March 28-April 3 – Arousing Effort

Not arousing oneself from discontent and laziness is the proximate cause for sloth and torpor.

Commentary to the Middle Length Discourses

Reflection: Are there ways that you are lazy? If so, what are some of the conditions that support your laziness? What are some of the healthy alternatives to being lazy? How can you arouse effort to overcome laziness?

Practice: During this week, experiment with applying more effort in meditation. This can be done physically by sitting up straighter or by doing brisk walking meditation before sitting. It can be done mentally by putting more effort into being alert and mindful of what is happening during the meditation. If applying more effort agitates you, try to match the increased effort with increased calm or inner stillness.

The Five Hindrances – Restlessness and Worry Practices and Reflections

In each of the following weeks repeatedly spend time with the reflection and practice for that week. It would be helpful if you also discussed your reflections with others.

Suggested reading: Article on the Hindrance of Restlessness and Worry on the article page of IMC's website:

<http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/articles/HindranceOfRestlessness.html>

Restlessness (uddhaca) is characterized by disquiet, like water whipped up by the wind. It functions as unsteadiness, like a flag whipped by the wind. It manifests as turmoil, like ashes scattered by thrown stones. Path of Purification XIV, 165

April 3 – 9: Noticing restlessness

Frequently giving unwise attention to a restless mind nourishes restlessness and remorse that is occurring and which has not yet occurred. SN 46:51

Reflection: During this week, please look for opportunities to investigate your restlessness. How often are you restless in either body or mind? What effect does restlessness have on your life? How do you tend to act when you are restless? What are some of the situations that trigger you to be restless? Spend some time reflecting what beliefs underlie whatever restlessness you have.

Practice: Give special attention to noticing how restlessness operates while you meditate. Bring lots of mindfulness to whatever degree of restlessness you can identify, no matter how subtle. Notice where and how restlessness appears in your body and your mind. How does restlessness affect your mindfulness and what happens to restlessness when you can hold it in mindful attention?

April 10-16: Noticing calm

Frequently giving wise attention to a still mind depletes restlessness and remorse that is occurring and which has not yet occurred SN 46:51

Reflection: During this week, please look for opportunities to investigate calmness. What are the times of day when you are most likely to be calm? How much value do you give to calmness? What supports you to be calm? What are the most common conditions that cause you to lose your calm?

Practice: Give special attention to being calm during meditation. Just before you meditate spend a few minutes doing some calming activity. During meditation tune into that part of your experience which is satisfyingly still or calm. Notice how calm or tranquility is experienced in your body and mind. How does calm affect your mindfulness and how does mindfulness support calm?

Worry (kukucca) is characterized by regret. It functions to grieve about what has or what has not been done. It manifests as remorse. It should be regarded as slavery. *Path of Purification XIV, 174*

April 17-23: Reviewing remorse

Reflections: Please consider some of the things you have remorse about as well as unresolved issues you have that cause you to be agitated or preoccupied. Over several days, make up a list of these. Look the list over and see if you can discern any pattern in the kind of things that are unresolved. Do they mostly concern events of the past or about events that are still current? Spend time considering how you might resolve these issues or your relationship to them so that they no longer cause you to be preoccupied with remorse or agitation.

Practice: Look over your list of things that are unresolved or that you have regrets over and find one or two that you can do something to resolve. It might be something that requires you to apologize, make amends, or have a difficult conversation with someone. Make an effort to do this.

April 24-30: Questioning Worry

Reflections: Several times over the week spend time reflecting on the beliefs that underlie your worries. Question these beliefs. Are they true or useful? How did you acquire these beliefs? Why might these beliefs have enough power to cause you to worry? How do these beliefs relate to your self-image or ideas of self? Try to have an in-depth conversation with someone about what you are thinking about as you reflect on these questions. Alternatively, write down your reflections.

Practices: During meditation this week focus on mindfulness of breathing. Focus on the calming and stilling affect of focusing on the breath. This might be done by getting enough into the rhythm of breathing in and out that you maintain a longer sustained attention on each cycle of breathing. Perhaps it can be done by breathing into or through any place of agitation or tension you have. Sometimes it can be calming to remember to let go of thoughts at the end of every exhale.

If there is water in a pot, stirred by the wind, agitated and producing waves, a person with a normal faculty of sight could not properly see the image of his or her own face. In the same way, when one's mind is possessed by restlessness and remorse, one cannot properly see the escape from restlessness and remorse; then one does not properly understand one's own welfare, nor that of another, nor that of both; and also teachings memorized a long time ago do not come into one's mind, not to speak of those not memorized. *SN 46:55*

When one does not cling, one is not agitated.

MN 140.22

The Five Hindrances – Uncertainty or Doubt Practices and Reflections

In each of the following weeks repeatedly spend time with the reflection and practice for that week. It would be helpful if you also discussed your reflections with others.

Suggested reading: “Doubt” on the article page of IMC’s website:
<http://insightmeditationcenter.org/articles/DoubtingDoubt.html>

Uncertainty (vicikicchā) is characterized by doubt (saṅsaya). Its function is to waver. It is manifested as lack of motivation and ambiguity. Unwise attention is its proximate cause. It should be seen as a hindrance to practice.

Path of Purification XIV,177

May 1-7: Facing One’s Doubts

I know of no other single thing that has the power to bring on doubt and to cause doubt to increase than unwise attention.

The Buddha

Reflection: Consider carefully what doubts you have in relation to meditation practice and/or Buddhist practice. Are you skeptical or uncertain about any of the teachings? Do you doubt your own ability to practice? Are you ambivalent about some of the goals or results of practice? Does this uncertainty affect how you practice? In what ways might doubt interfere with your practice?

Practice: Write up a list of ten questions you have about Buddhism or about meditation practice. Try to come up with questions which have a direct bearing on how and what you practice. Of these ten questions, write down the one that is most significant for you personally and bring it to our final hindrance class on June.

May 8-14: Confidence

Reflection: How would you rate the strength of your confidence in meditation teachings and in yourself as a meditation practitioner? Over the time you have meditated, in what ways has your confidence fluctuated? What are some of the reasons for this fluctuation? With your involvement with meditation, what are the primary ways that you feel confidence?

Practice: Before each session of meditation, remind yourself of those things that give you confidence in the practice. Let that confidence support you during meditation. How does this affect your meditation practice?

May 15-21: Conditions for Doubt

Reflections: What are the situations, conditions and beliefs which are most likely to trigger doubt? What effect do frustrations and difficulties in meditation have on the arising of doubt? What are some of the conditions you can put into place which might support your confidence and resolve in practice?

Practice: Each time that doubt, uncertainty, hesitation, or indecisiveness occur in meditation, use a mental note, “doubt” to label it. Note it several times and see if you can free yourself from believing the doubt. Doubt involves belief. Can you note the belief to free yourself from it? At the end of meditation, reflect how often you noted “doubt.”

May 22-28: Conflict

Reflections: Do you have any fear or hesitation about what might happen to you when you practice meditation? Are you frightened or resistant to possible meditation experiences? Do you feel any conflict with doing meditation because other activities seem more important? Are you worried that meditation practice will change you in ways that make you uncomfortable? Is any part of your life challenged by your meditation practice? Please discuss these fears and concerns with someone.

Practices: If you are aware of any sense of fear or conflict as you meditate, bring your mindfulness directly to the felt experience of the fear or conflict. Use your attention to become more familiar to how it is experienced as opposed to what you believe about it. Try using mental noting to see if you can free yourself from being entangled with the sense of conflict. Simply know that it is there and notice what happens to it as you stay present.

May 29- June 5: Commitment

Reflections: What is your relationship to commitments? Do you hesitate to commit to things? Do you follow through on commitments? Do you commit to things easily? How would you describe your commitment to meditation and/or Buddhist practice? Compared to other things you are committed to, how strong is your commitment to practice?

Practice: For this week, make a firm commitment to practice meditation. Choose a commitment that is reasonable to fulfill. If you don't meditate every day, commit to a daily practice. If you already practice each day, perhaps lengthen your meditation time. Follow through on the commitment and notice what various ways the commitment is helpful.

If there is a pot of water which is turbid, stirred up and muddy, and this pot is put into a dark place, then a person with normal eyesight would not recognize and see his or her own image reflected in the water. In the same way, when one's mind is possessed by doubt, overpowered by doubt, then one cannot properly see the escape from doubt which has arisen; then one does not properly understand one's own welfare, nor that of another, nor that of both.

Samyutta Nikaya 46:55

Qualities Connected to Doubt

This list is collected from the students who participated in the Dharma Practice Day

Physical Qualities

heavy
confused
foggy
sluggish
restless
leaning forward
fatigued
ungrounded
create comfort
urge to move
heat/pain
tightness
deflated
anxious
tense
shallow breath
agitated
emptiness in gut
contraction
folding in on self
uncomfortable in body
enervating
deflated
nervous
unsettled in chest
hungry

Cognitive Qualities/Beliefs

What's the point?
Will it do any good?
I'm lazy
I can't
vacillation/uncertainty
I don't want to
I don't know the answer
This doesn't work
I'm not the type/not me
How can I figure it out?
I need help
It's a cult
It doesn't work
I should feel connected
I should be certain
There is a right way to be
I'm not ok
I'm not enough

I'm not worthy of the dharma
I'm not good enough
I'm unworthy
I'm flawed
I'm incapable
I should be able to figure this out myself
It's too hard
I should be a monastic
I'll never be a nun
I have to suffer
I have to give up everything
I'm going to lose who I am
Who am I if I give up my personality?

Emotions

aversion
anger
frustration
disconnected/lonely
fear
insecure
helpless
anxious
depressed
frenetic
nervous
unsettled
grief
intimidated
overwhelmed
confused and foggy
power
uncertain
wayward
shiftless
rudderless
despair
hesitant

Motivations

decrease of motivation
paralysis
try harder
make feeling go away
do
want to figure it out
quit
become passive
get my way
apathy
embrace my victimhood
can't start
find an easy way out
find an excuse not to do it
run
avoid
destroy and refute it
do something pleasurable

Behavior

not do it
doing something one regrets
avoidance
put things on hold
shut down
eat
decide too quickly because of discomfort
with uncertainty
paralysis
escape
short with people
indecisive
quit
run away
shyness
avoid things/people
watch TV
sleep
internet/email
withdraw
stop eating
collect facts
read
make lists
procrastinate
anger
gossip
avoid sitting
imaginary conversations

head outdoors
head for the light
turn to nature
listen to dharma talks or lectures
talk about it
see a therapist
study it
turn towards it