The Five Hindrances

# Energy Imbalance:

Restless and anxiety is a high energy state, but the energy is not engaged in the practice.

Sloth and Torpor is a low energy state which may derive from a resistance to the practice

Restlessness and Anxiety

Sloth and Torpor

We can work with these hindrances by practicing balance: relaxing from restlessness, concentrating from torpor, aiming for a mid-point.

One could also see this as cultivating the opposite. Torpor is the negative aspect of a low energy state, relaxation the positive. Restlessness is the negative aspect of a high energy state, concentration, clarity and alertness the positive.

Alert

Relaxed

Restless

Torpid

So if we’re feeling torpid, we can bring more alertness in: the positive side of the opposite pole. If we’re feeling restless, we can relax.

# Emotional Resistance

The root poisons in Buddhism are Greed, Hatred and Delusion. These find expression as the hindrances of sense desire, ill will, and sceptical doubt.

Sense desire and ill will are two sides of the same coin: wanting a different experience, not wanting the experience we are having. They arise together, but one will be uppermost.

Delusion is a wilful ignorance: a desire not to know, not to get involved with. The hindrance of sceptical doubt is an expression of the fixed view ‘this will not work’ rather than an openness to the possibilities that it may or may not work. It has the quality of wilful ignorance: a resistance to engaging with the practice in an exploratory way to discover whether it does work.

Sense Desire

Ill Will

Hatred

Greed

Delusion

Sceptical Doubt

Doubt is not necessarily a hindrance: it is helpful to be open to the possibility that we might be wrong. The opposite is confidence, which is positive when rooted in the three jewels (Shraddha), but not helpful when an inflated and fixed self-regard

Open Enquiry

Shraddha

Skepticism

Inflation

We can see sense desire and ill will as the negative aspects of opposite poles.

Turning towards

Letting go

Ill Will

Sense Desire

Cultivating the opposite, if we’re in sense desire we can see if we can let go of it. If this letting go becomes an endeavour to get rid of, we can turn towards that, and feel in to it with sensitivity.

# Working with the hindrances

We work with hindrances not by shutting them out of awareness, but by bringing wise attention to them. Where unwise attention involves identifying with and hence cultivating and developing the hindrance further, wise attention involves holding in kindly awareness with forbearance.

Wise attention is attention with the qualities of awareness: an openness to the experience, particularly to the underlying emotion, a sensitivity - willingness to empathically feel in to the unique nuance and texture of the experience, and an understanding of

Unwise attention is unwise because it is rooted in wilful ignorance: staying in the content of the thoughts thrown up, from the desire not to experience the painful feelings and emotions that drive them. A deliberate, defensive insensitivity.

## Example: we find ourselves blaming another

* Become aware of the chain of thoughts
* Under this, become aware of the view: that they have done us wrong
* Become aware of the emotion behind this: anger. The blaming is a way of shielding us from the painfulness of experiencing anger, and the pain of acknowledging that sometimes we’re an angry person
* Staying with awareness of anger reveals the underlying hurt (feeling)
* Staying with the hurt, sympathetically, it resolves in to our natural sensitivity: raw at first.

Blame <- Anger <- Hurt <- Sensitivity

* Bringing hindrance to resolution requires patience, kindly awareness, and honesty
* We need to steer a middle way between getting caught up in the hindrance and pushing it away: between identifying and rejecting
* We need to take an interest and approach sympathetically, not confrontationally – looking for the nuance in the experience, seeing if it will reveal what drives it.