

Resolving Hindrances

Check for the 5 hindrances

1. Restlessness and Anxiety
2. Sense Desire
3. Ill Will
4. Sloth and Torpor
5. Sceptical doubt and indecision

Resolving hindrance in to sensitivity

We can use the innate feelingfulness of our mind to resolve hindrance in to sensitivity

Bringing our attention to our experience

The first thing we often notice is our thoughts, and their content: these are on the surface of the mind. If our thinking is light there is no problem: just consistently return the centre of our attention to the focus, allowing thoughts and any other experiences that arise to do so in our broad awareness.

A strong emotional charge

With hindrances, on the other hand, the thinking is driven by a strong emotional charge, which has a hold on us. Here, we need to feel our way under the thoughts to their emotional basis, and recognize how this is driving them. We need to take an interest in our experience and approach sympathetically, not confrontationally, looking for the nuance in the experience, seeing if it will reveal what drives it. If the hindrances have knocked on our door, then that is where our meditation is: working creatively with hindrance is practising meditation: it's not distractedness.

Entertaining the emotion

We 'entertain' the emotion: recognize and acknowledge it's there; hold in kindly, patient awareness with forbearance, steering a middle way between getting caught up and pushing away: between identifying with and rejecting. What is pushed out of awareness returns as hindrance and controls. Being with the emotion in a spacious way: "aware of anger in my experience" rather than "I am angry". We're identifying with the awareness, not the anger. Awareness is the essential nature of our mind: anger is just a habit.

Emotions have feelings too!

Staying with the anger, patiently, reveals the underlying hurt: "emotions have feelings too!" Anger is painful to acknowledge, and it's painful to acknowledge that sometimes we're an angry person. There's a 3-fold dukkha: the hurt we're reacting to, the painful vedana of the anger itself, and the pain of owning that we're to some extent prone to anger. The thoughts of blame were a smokescreen, diverting attention from this underlying dukkha.

Two noble truths:

Being prepared to be with, to fully acknowledge and feel this painful vedana is to see the 1st noble truth directly in our experience: there is dukkha – and at the same time to see directly the 2nd: negative emotions not only tend towards painful outcomes in the future, they are painful to experience in

themselves in the present. When we see the truth of the Dharma as immediately apparent in our direct experience (*sanditthiko*) we gain faith (*sraddha*) that it is true.

Meditation is an interplay and balance of *prajna* and *sraddha*: turning towards our experience and seeing it as it is (*prajna*), and when this understanding is established, relaxing in to a confidence/trust (*sraddha*) that we know at least this much in our own experience.

Entertaining the feeling

Again, as with the emotion, we are being with the feelings, but not identifying with them: “I’m aware of a painful hurt feeling” rather than “I’m hurt, I’m in pain”. Identifying with the awareness, not lost in the pain, bringing kindness, patience, forbearance, and a willingness to turn towards what is unpleasant and aspects of ourselves that we don’t like to think of as part of our character, such as ‘I’m easily hurt, I’m rather sensitive’ – which is in fact part of recognizing our humanity.

Feeling in to sensitivity

Staying with the feeling, the hurt, sympathetically, really feeling it through, turning towards it fully, fully experiencing acknowledging and accepting that it's there: that we are (in part, at the moment) like this: we do get hurt – gradually the sting comes out of it, leaving a sense of rawness that resolves in to the natural feelingfulness and sensitivity of awareness.

This coming back to awareness is a coming home: to our own nature. When we are at home, in awareness, we can fully feel whatever experience arises without resistance. Being fully experienced, it arises and self-liberates in the same moment, leaving no trace. Where there is resistance and denial, the feeling quality of the experience is overlaid leaving a tension held in the body and returning to the mind as hindrance: but in each moment, there is always the opportunity to experience this freshly: whichever aspect of it is calling for our attention: the preoccupying thoughts, the emotional charge or the feeling tone – allowing each to be fully experienced, fully felt, letting them go.

Two more noble truths:

This is bringing awareness to the gap between experiencing the fruits of past *karma*, and setting up new *karma*. It is transformative because awareness holds the qualities of patience, kindness, forbearance and sympathy that are lacking in the reactive mind. The awareness itself is not painful, or in pain, and it is the awareness that is our own nature rather than any particular feelings or emotions in our experience. Seeing this is to see the 3rd noble truth - the possibility of freedom from suffering – directly in our experience, and following this whole transformative process through from angrily blaming others to coming home to the innate sensitivity of awareness is to see the 4th noble truth: the path to the cessation of suffering.

Our approach has been one of sensitivity and feelingfulness, yet it has afforded an opportunity for clarity: seeing the 4 noble truths as immediately apparent here and now in our experience (*sandittiko*) because clarity is not separable from sensitivity: they are both aspects of awareness.

Taking the long view

Strong hindrances may not be resolvable in one meditation. It may take years – but don’t worry: they will return if they need to – in an endless series of opportunities. Just work as appropriately as you can, and if the hindrance withdraws, return to the focus.

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
Who violently sweep your house
Empty of its furniture,
Still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
For some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice:
Meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes,
Because each has been sent
As a guide from beyond. (Rumi: The Guest House)

The basic poetic metaphor: mind as a guest house

- Hindrances – old familiar friends – arrive as unbidden visitors
- We need to welcome and entertain them: say 'hello': adopt a friendly attitude
- i.e. bring awareness and attention to them: notice they have entered: greet them at the door instead of pushing them away. Recognize and acknowledge that they are there: we can't shut them out: they have a claim on our attention.

Be grateful for whoever comes

- They've come to take the opportunity to resolve themselves: habitual patterns insisting on intimacy with us
- Bringing awareness and attention to them gives the opportunity of resolution
- When pushed away, they become more insistent: what's kept out controls
- We don't want to identify with them – which would cause them to grow – but we can recognize, bring awareness and attention to, and act as host to them

Each has been sent as a guide from beyond

- Our mind is returning to us what is unresolved
- Trust the wisdom in and rightness to what is arising
- Hindrances are frustrated or thwarted emotions with an inner wisdom: that they will continue to present themselves until resolved.
- It is important to entertain them for as long as necessary:
 - Not be impatient with them

- Not think that our meditation is elsewhere: if the hindrances have knocked on our door, that's where our meditation is
- It is equally important to know the difference between entertaining and indulging:
 - Indulging is identifying with and hence cultivating and developing
 - Entertaining is being aware of: holding in a kindly awareness with forbearance
- 'Every feeling would most dearly and deeply like to be fully felt through: then it will become a happy, integrated feeling' (Prakasa)
 - Hindrances manifest in a painful way
 - But their inner nature is a sensitivity which has become distorted.

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 in our guest and approach sympathetically, not confrontationally – looking for the nuance in the experience, seeing if it will reveal what drives it.