Becoming Unhindered: The Five Difficult Mind States

Sharda Rogell · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2007) · 57:04

Tonight I'd like to talk about what I call the five difficult mind states. Classically they're called the hindrances, but I like to call them the five difficult mind states because they're mind states that we always have to work with, and they're not necessarily a hindrance to our practice. So I want to talk about these difficult states of mind and also how they're hindrances to a deepening of our clear seeing and our meditation.

Sometimes when we give this talk, it's usually at the beginning of a retreat, and so a number of you are beginning a retreat, so it's appropriate. And a number of you have been sitting for a while, and I still think it's appropriate. When we first come into a retreat, perhaps these states of mind might be a bit more activated, and they may be stronger for you. But people who have been sitting for a while—maybe six weeks, or the yogis who are staying for three months—these difficult mind states may be much less or they may be absent, but they can still arise in more subtle ways. And I wonder, too, with the transition and the change over the last few days for those who have been here for a while, perhaps there's been some stirrings, and some of these difficult states of mind could get activated again.

So I want to talk about these, and I'll go over them fairly briefly. Each one could be a whole talk in itself. We're talking about five states of mind that the Buddha identified as states of mind that need to be seen, identified, understood, and known how to work with in our practice so that they don't hinder us along the way.

The first one is the wanting mind, or desire for sense pleasures. The second one is aversion, the opposite, or the not-wanting mind. The third one is what we love to say: sloth and torpor—the sleepiness, tiredness, dullness of mind. The fourth one is the opposite energy of that: restlessness, a lot of energy. And the last one is doubt—self-doubt or skeptical doubt.

I want to talk about these and bring some clarity about how we can open to them more fully so we're not hindered along the way. The Pali word for hindrances is *nīvaraṇa*, and it literally translates as "covered over." It really means that when we're identified with our states of mind, our mindfulness gets covered over in a way. We can't see as clearly. We can't see what's happening so well in our experience because we're caught or we're identified. We think that something's wrong, that we need to overcome something in order to continue along our path. So there's a sense of being covered over, and then it's hard to recognize these states of mind just as states of mind without taking them so personally and getting caught

up in this whole sense that something's wrong, that we're going the wrong way in our practice.

When we feel hindered—let's tease this word apart—when we feel hindered, we feel like something blocks our way or there's an interference with the flow of movement. That's the sense of being hindered, just as if we were walking down a path and something blocks us or hinders our forward movement. We can't carry on. We can feel like something's in the way: I can't go, I can't go forward. In our meditation, we can feel disconnected from the flow of our experience. We can feel blocked or impeded in some way, like something's not going right. There's almost the sense of hitting a wall or some kind of obstacle. And this is the way we might perceive if we're not seeing clearly what's actually happening.

So to get a sense of this, we can ask: What's our meditation like when we're having a good meditation? What kind of idea do you have about what it means to have a good meditation? When we answer that, we might talk about feeling open, feeling at ease, things are flowing, there's a sense of the changing, impermanent nature of things, we feel unblocked or a sense that nothing's in the way—some kind of way we feel unhindered.

And when we feel hindered, we might experience more of the sense of being caught, which we call identification—the stickiness of mind. I love this metaphor of the Velcro mind. You know Velcro just sticks together, and when you stick it together and try to peel it apart, it's very hard to get it to come apart. The mind can feel like that when we're identified—sticky in this way. This is a kind of selfing or fixation of self. We have a sense that the flow has stopped because there's clinging in the mind. But nothing's stopped. There's no flow that has been impeded. Nothing can stop the flow of experience. It's just that we experience it this way. We think it's this way. It's a mental thing, a kind of perception or view of what's happening.

We can experience this as a kind of tension in ourselves, a tension between what's actually happening and what we want to have happen, what we would like. And generally, what we like is to feel good, to feel comfortable, to have our expectations of what's happening in our experience match our ideas of what a good meditation is—like I was just saying, that kind of openness, ease, flow. We want to match our standards of what we've set up to be good or right in our meditation.

But all this is just in the way, really. If we can let go of our preferences for what we'd like and allow what's happening to happen, as Sally was speaking about last night, then what's happening in the mind and the body is just the changing landscape of our mind, the changing landscape of our body.

So this is what I want to talk a little bit about with each one of these—how we can actually look at each one of these difficult states of mind and look at it in a way that we don't feel so impeded. We don't feel hindered. We don't have a sense that anything's wrong. This is so important, to overcome this idea.

I can remember so many times in my own practice when my experience started to change and I didn't feel good, or I was having more difficult, unpleasant kinds of experiences, I would think I was doing

something wrong. I don't know if you've had this sense. And somehow you have to get over it. I have to get over it. And of course I always wanted to report good experiences to my teachers in the interviews. I didn't want to go in and share my idea of what was difficult. So again, all my expectations about what was good or right, and then wanting to maybe even embellish in some way when I spoke with my teachers about it. All this kind of way that we get caught, get identified with our ideas and our expectations.

I like this simile, this clear pond simile, to point to and get a sense of how each one of these operates. If you imagine the pure mind like a clear pool where you can see down into the depths, then sense desire would be like pouring beautiful dyes into the pool. You would get entranced by the colors and not be able to see down into the depths—distracted, entranced by these beautiful colors.

Aversion would be like if the pond had hot water put into it, or had hot mud on the bottom and it started to boil like a hot spring—mud boiling in hot pools. It would be turbulent and hot and disturbing, and you wouldn't again be able to see down to the bottom. Aversion is like this hot disturbance.

Sloth and torpor would be like thick layers of weeds and algae on the pond's surface, too thick to see to the bottom.

Restlessness is like if there was a strong wind blowing across the top of the pool. Just on the surface, again, you wouldn't be able to see down to the depths.

And doubt, when there's identification with doubt, it's as if somebody took a big stick and stirred up the mud on the bottom of the pond. All the mud came up and the water got murky and cloudy. Again, you can't see clearly. That's what you think the water is—just murky and muddy.

This is the sense of these qualities, the characteristics of the mind states when we get caught up in them.

So the first one, desire—which is really desire for sensual pleasures, the wanting for pleasure, wanting for a pleasurable experience or something that feels good. Do you know this one? This leaning towards, leaning towards.

And you can't really separate desire so much from aversion. These two really work together, because the desire for something is a kind of rejection of what is right now. It's a way that we don't really want to rest into our present experience. So there's a leaning, a kind of toppling forward to something else that we think is going to change our experience enough that we'll feel better than we do now. There's an aversive quality in the desire for that pleasant thing.

And both of them are grasping. Whether it's desire or whether it's aversion, there's a contracted mind state, which then contracts the body. When we're exploring each of these, it's really good to get a sense of the energetic feeling in the body, what it's actually like to feel these, because we have to know them. When they arise, it's like, "Oh yeah, that's desire. That's what this feels like." It's not just a mental contraction of wanting that thing, but we can feel it all through the body when we become sensitive enough.

The energetic feeling is when the body is pulled. You can actually feel it—you can feel like you want to get up and move right towards that object. I've had this so many times in my sitting meditation, where I've had the desire not to be feeling what I'm feeling—which is a kind of aversion—the desire to leave the room. If you're very mindful, you can feel all the muscles just wanting to move the body in that direction of the desire. And you have to contract the body in order to move it. So you can feel this whole energetic movement of desire when you start to get sensitive.

And therefore, in knowing that and being able to observe it, you can interrupt it. You don't have to just follow the desire heedlessly or mindlessly, because there's mindfulness, there's awareness to say, "Oh yeah, I'm being pulled towards something right now and rejecting what's happening in this moment." The mind is not content to be here, and it's seeking its fulfillment outward in something else, some other condition—whether it's the cup of tea, or the soft bed, or fresh air outside. Not that these things are wrong or bad. It's just that we want to know: What's compelling? What's motivating? What's pulling, and what are we being pulled away from? Very important to recognize if there is rejection, if there is grasping happening—which is another way of knowing quite well that desire is happening.

If I believe that my fulfillment is dependent on feeling good, really reflect on this. I'm happy when I feel good.

This way that we're wired up. If I really believe this—that my fulfillment is dependent on feeling good—then I'm going to be manipulating my conditions. Grasping onto the pleasant, pushing away the unpleasant, and probably trying to line up as many pleasant experiences as I can. And this whole kind of manipulation, which comes from the selfing, the sense of me and what I want and what I don't want, is all about me. Rather than this sense of resting back and opening to the flow of conditionality and paying attention to our responses—the aversion and the desire, the aversion and the desire—which we've been talking about and will keep encouraging.

So this pull towards something better than what's happening here, this desire for sensual pleasure. The first thing to do in working with this movement of mind—and the first step always—is the mindfulness of it, the recognition of it, the identification, and becoming familiar with the way this moves in our body, in our mind. Understanding this movement of desire is essential. I'm sure we'll be having many more talks on this, and some of you who have been here already have had many talks, because it's one of the key teachings: the second noble truth of the Buddha, the cause of our dukkha, the cause of our unsatisfactoriness, is this clinging, this grasping of desire and aversion. So first we want to know it. We really want to know it well. How does it move in our mind and body?

Another useful antidote when you recognize that desire has arisen is to reflect on impermanence. Reflecting on how all conditions arise and pass, come and go. And you can ask yourself the question: How much will fulfilling this desire right now matter tomorrow, or in six months, or at the end of my life? This helps us get some perspective on how big this desire can feel in the moment, but when we look at our life,

how important is it really? What if I just sat here right now and didn't act out, or what I call discharge, that energy of the desire? What if I didn't fulfill it but actually sat here and explored, felt, sensed? What if I came into some understanding about the nature of desire itself?

For myself, after years of working with the teachings and the practice, it's so interesting to see that in some ways I can't even reach out anymore. That movement that wants to go out towards what I think is going to bring me my happiness and my fulfillment—I can't even do it anymore. It's like I know so well that my happiness doesn't lie out there, that I need to continually come back here and find the resources and my own capacity for my own aliveness and contentment right here. Anything else is just going to slip right through my fingers, like sand through my fingers. It's so interesting how that wisdom of knowing what's true can just interrupt that flow of conditioned desire.

So the reflection on impermanence. And another antidote that can help us with desire is wise restraint, using moderation. For example, for the people who have been here for a while, for the three-month yogis, it may be a time in your practice where you begin to simplify more if you haven't already. You can eat less or sleep less, put more emphasis on continuity in the practice, really challenge some of the habits to get comfortable. Because it can be interesting how even in this situation you just find your lines of comfort, your places of comfort. And so here's an opportunity to challenge that a little too, start to use a little bit more restraint and see what happens as you begin to look more deeply at this movement of desire for pleasure, for comfort.

The eight precepts are also something that people take on to challenge ourselves in this way. And you'll have an opportunity to take that on for those of you who haven't yet. We don't do this from a place of should, an imposed idea of what we're supposed to do as good practitioners, but more from a place of wisdom that asks the question: If I do this, is it helpful for my awakening, for my liberation? We want to turn the mind, incline the mind towards what's helpful, towards what's supportive for waking up. So we work with things in this way.

And as our concentration starts to deepen and our mind becomes more one-pointed and unified, this begins to counter sense desire, because then even the most alluring distraction cannot move the mind. The mind is just not infatuated with things in the same way. A concentrated mind is happy here, happy at home. So the meditation already supports this interruption and shifting of this condition of mind.

So desire. Now, aversion—the opposite energy. The contracted mind, the not-wanting mind, which is judging, condemning, resistance, anger, fear, hatred. These strong emotions that always have some kind of charge to them. Even when I talk about it, I feel the tightening up of the mind. It's usually a reaction to something unpleasant—through the five senses or something going through the mind. And again, it's the energetic feeling that I've been talking about. We experience the mind and the body in this tightening energy, a resistance to our present reality. We don't want it. We don't like it. We don't want it to be this way. And the mind can get very firm, very strong in its reactivity around this.

There's a belief when aversion is present that something is taking away my happiness, that somehow we're losing our happiness because of this thing that's happening. And only if it didn't happen, if I could change it in some way, if I could do something different—then my happiness will come back. This is conditional happiness, not unconditional happiness, not the happiness of the Buddha. Conditioned happiness, dependent on present conditions.

It's a very complex mind state, aversion is. Because sometimes when we feel aversive, when we feel some of those states that I mentioned, we can notice that in ourselves and then get aversive to ourselves because we're aversive. And then when we see that, we can add another layer of aversion to the aversion to the aversion. It just keeps piling up in all different kinds of fear and resistance and anger and judging. We just can get ourselves in such a tight ball of aversion.

And so what we can do really is work only with the outer layer of aversion. You can't really get down into what the aversion is really about. You almost have to just notice the most outer reaction to the aversion. Say, "Oh yeah, I'm reacting to my aversive mind," and bring some softness, some kindness to that. And then as you begin to soften that, you can start moving more in towards what's in the center there. It's very complex.

So again, for the three-month yogis, the transition here may have stirred some things up for you. Many more people came in. You have a much bigger group of people here than you had for the six weeks. People aren't as quiet generally, moving around maybe a little faster or maybe not as mindful, closing the doors yet, that sort of thing. And there can be that reaction. What can happen is the blame and the judgment come up so quickly that we're missing feeling the unpleasant quality of the experience that we're actually reacting to. It's not about what's happening out there. It's not about what anybody's doing here. It's about how we are with it, how we're responding to it, how we're reacting towards it. And when you look closely, you see it's just something so unpleasant that it's hard to stay with it. It's hard to be mindful.

I can remember during one of my early three-month retreats, sitting and just feeling all this aversion in my mind contract, and I didn't even know why. Finally, I just asked myself, "What's going on? What's going on here?" And I came down into my body, and I noticed that I had this really bad ache, a little pain in my kidney—just a teeny little really sharp pain—and I didn't want to feel it. Feeling that, just the subtlety of that unpleasantness, was too much to feel. And as I recognized that, I brought my attention down and felt it, and that was it. My experience started to open. My mind started to open. And I could breathe again. It's like, "Oh, just that. I didn't want that there. It was very uncomfortable."

Sometimes we don't even know. We don't even know what we're reacting to. We don't know what's going on. So we want to ask, perhaps, what is so painful about this situation that I'll do anything not to feel it, not to be present with my experience? Because sometimes it's really hard just to be that simple with ourselves when we're feeling unpleasantness.

So the antidotes, working with aversion, really are mindfulness and compassion. Recognizing,

acknowledging, in some sense, "This is aversion in the mind. The mind is filled with aversion right now." And then to see if we can turn towards it and feel it. Feel the contraction. Actually start to bring the awareness closer to the unpleasantness, as Guy was speaking about this morning. Begin to soften around the contraction and see what happens as we breathe and soften, breathe and soften.

But you really need curiosity. You need a certain willingness and curiosity to do this, or we'll just stay in the separation and the resistance. Because it's hard. It's hard to do this practice that we're being asked to do here, especially when we're talking about painful aspects. And the aversion doesn't need to go away. We just want to invite some understanding. What is it? Why? What happens if the mind gets involved in these difficult states? Aversion is an energy that wants to, again, discharge.

It wants to act out so we can discharge and get rid of that difficult state. By being mindful of the energy and containing it—this energy that wants to act out in some way—we can begin to neutralize the reaction. Just the holding of the energy, without discharging, can begin to neutralize it. As concentration develops and we have more contact with the present moment, we begin to feel delight and joy in the contact itself with the present. This joy then shuts out the aversion and ill will. It actually keeps the aversion at bay because we start to feel satisfied with the sense of presence—the recognition that we actually can be here for ourselves no matter what's happening.

So those are desire and aversion. The third hindrance is sloth and torpor. All you have to do is say it and you know what it is. You can identify it right away because your whole body just starts to go to sleep. The loss of energy, the lack of energy, the sleepiness, dullness, laziness, boredom—when there's just not much energy to even pay attention or to lift the mind to our experience. We feel heavy, we feel pulled down, we feel like we're sinking.

And yet we're asked to stay present even with this. This can be hard because how are we going to be present when it takes energy to be present and there isn't any? It can be easy to feel aversive towards this state because we think we're not doing good meditation. If we can't lift the mind, if we can't be more mindful, if we're just dull or tired, we can easily judge and condemn ourselves. But if we are able to stay present with this too, it can help to deepen our concentration.

It's really important to investigate this mind state because we human beings have a general habit of cutting off from our experience, of going to sleep, of not really wanting to be here so much. Becoming a bit dull or sleepy or not really paying attention is sometimes a little more comfortable. It's a little easier than actually knowing what's going on. Again, it's a challenge to be here.

There are three possibilities when we're feeling sleepy or dull. One is that it may be a genuine physical need. It's interesting how many people forget this on meditation retreats—that the body needs rest. Perhaps we're not feeling well, or we're a little bit off, or we've just arrived and are making the adjustment. A number of you have just come in. You may have had stressful conditions before you came, and it takes some time to bring clarity or sharpness. All this is natural and not unusual at all, particularly

at the beginning of a retreat. For me, on a ten-day retreat, it would often take four days before I started to get over my sleepiness or dullness. I remember thinking that was really a problem given that it was only ten days, and I would sometimes give myself a hard time. But for some reason, this body and mind goes through that, and all I could do was bring mindful attention to it without judging myself.

The second possibility is that it may be a strong habit or tendency of mind to shut down—a way we actually get defensive in relationship to our experience when it's too hard to feel, too hard to allow in what's happening. We have a habit of keeping things away. This is something we want to know and understand if it's occurring for us. When we do this kind of cutting off over a long period of time, over years, we can actually feel a numbness in our nervous system, like a dull coating over our experience. It's as if we can't even make contact because of this numbing or freezing habit in our system. We experience it as dullness or lethargy.

But when we start to wake up from this, as we do on longer retreats, what can happen is that we're actually bringing unconscious material up into consciousness. That can be hard, so we might want to retreat to our old strategies. It's important to know that as we wake up, we're uncovering—allowing certain issues to surface that we may not have looked at before. This is good. We want this so we can have more understanding, more self-understanding of who I am, what this is about.

So we have the physical need and the habit of mind. Another way we might cut off from our experience is resisting something that's happening in the present.

There's some intuition, some kind of sense that something's occurring, and I don't want to feel it. I don't want to know about it. It's like, "Not this. I'm not ready for this." And there can be a way of just habitually cutting off, pushing it out—something we might want to know about if we're doing that. It might be a way that our consciousness hasn't yet caught up with this particular pattern, and we're still not aware. It hasn't come into our consciousness, and we're still resisting it. Yet often these are emotional issues that do need some attention, whether they're some kind of fear, or loneliness, or some kind of anger, or a memory that might be surfacing. Can we work with the resistance—at first the sleepiness—and then, as we start to open, find ways to hold what's arising? We'll be talking more about the skill in doing this.

So this is what we want to examine around sleepiness: What's actually occurring? What's going on? We bring our attention to it. The antidote for working with it is to bring energy, to arouse some energy, because we need energy to explore, to investigate.

The first step in working with sleepiness is to really look at our relationship to it. Is there aversion to it? Is there resistance to the fact that I'm sleepy? Because if there is, then we can't really examine the sleepiness. First we have to work with the resistance—take off that layer—and then we can start to work with the sleepiness. If there is aversion, we want to include that in our awareness: "Oh yes, aversion is here." We bring our mindful attention to the aversion. That's also present. We don't have to somehow override it or push it away. "Okay, now it's aversion. That hindrance is present."

Otherwise, what can happen is that if we don't notice the resistance, it feeds the tiredness. If we're in a mode of resistance, we can just get more tired and not really know that we're feeding the tiredness in that way. It takes a lot of energy to be aversive. Have you noticed? It's really tiring to stay in an aversive mode.

So one aspect is looking at our relationship to the sleepiness. And then the second antidote is to really look at our intention to stay present. Are you actually interested in being present? Because in working with sleepiness, it takes a strong intention to arouse the energy when there isn't much there. You really need the intention to stay present with the sleepiness. There needs to be a certain determination, a certain sincere interest in that. And the intention actually brings energy. Anytime we have the intention to make something happen in a wholesome way, that already brings energy to the mindfulness.

So this returning back again—breathing, keeping our back straight, opening our eyes, putting your arms up on top of your head, standing up, doing faster walking—all of this helps to bring more energy when we're feeling a bit dull. But again, it takes a certain intention, a sincere interest to want to work with your energy in this way, to balance your energy when it gets too low, when it gets too dull.

Sometimes when you're sitting for longer periods and the concentration is strong, the tranquility and calm can get very deep, and this can create a kind of sinking mind. You can become so calm that you just sink away into the tranquility. So it can be a way that dullness or tiredness comes about through strong concentration, actually. This is just another way we want to balance the energy, using the same kind of antidotes to bring a bit more energy back. This intention to aim our attention at our experience—either the breath or the body—actually lifts the mind up and can counter this dullness of mind. This is how we can work with sleepiness in our practice.

Now, restlessness and worry. This is an agitated mind and body—the opposite energy. Agitation, anxiety, worry, frustration, edginess, irritability: another very complex mind state. Thoughts, feelings, sensations all happening together, very difficult to be with, and there's often aversion compounded with it.

Because the restlessness can be so unpleasant, we are often in resistance to it. The mind can be very scattered, unfocused, unable to rest. It moves in the past and the future, going into all kinds of memories and plannings and fantasy—this restless mind. You can spend hours going over the same thing again and again. It can be a sense of unfinished business, things you have to take care of, or conflicts you've had, and your mind just goes over and over and over again, trying to figure out a solution. "If I could just figure it out," you think, just going over and over. But it's just restless mind, really. And it goes into the body—agitated, nervous, and unsteady. The ground can feel very unsteady.

As I've explored restlessness in my own experience, I've really come to appreciate how deeply conditioned it is. I think I always kind of just thought of it as a hindrance I could overcome in my practice, but I now see this is really one of the more deeply conditioned, difficult mind states. One of my teachers, Hamid Ali, who started the Diamond Heart School, the Ridwan School in California, describes restlessness like this. He says that restlessness is a contraction in the nervous system. It is the specific feeling of suffering. It's

not just pain or anger or fear. It is emotional suffering in its purest form. It is the suffering at the core of all human pains.

Very deep. It's just this uneasiness of being in a human body and a human mind. And when I really appreciate this in this way, I see how easy it is to judge ourselves. When there's the fear or the worry or the restlessness, it's so easy to judge ourselves and make ourselves wrong for it. But it's very, very deep. And it takes so much compassion, so much kindness towards ourselves when we're feeling this.

So the antidote really is to bring a certain calm and steadiness of mind, as much as we can, without adding more pressure from the judgment, the aversion, the resistance. We really have to work with that outer layer—the relationship to the restlessness—so that we can begin to let the body and mind find its own balance, its own homeostasis. We're not adding more pressure. It's like being in a pressure cooker. We want to take the lid off as much as we can so that energy can start to release.

So we watch the judgment, the aversion, the resistance, but we also want to have a wide awareness, an open awareness, to hold the whole body. You can do gentle breathing, but not a very focused, very specific attention on the breath—more a gentle breathing with a wide awareness, to allow the energy to move in a wide field. It's sort of like the metaphor of cows being happier when they're in a wide field than in a small, closed pasture. Open it up so that energy can just move. It takes a lot of kind attention to ourselves when we're in this state.

And as the concentration deepens, we experience a kind of happiness of mind that is born from the concentration. The mind starts to be happier at home, and there's no need to go anywhere else. There's no need to find other conditions to overcome this restlessness. We start to experience more ease and comfort within ourselves. It's this happiness, this sukha, that actually starts to exclude the restlessness and the worry. We start to feel more present here, more comfortable here. This is the contentment that arises in us as we go deeper into understanding the conditions of this mind and body.

So we have desire, aversion, sloth and torpor, restlessness—and the last one is doubt. Skeptical doubt or self-doubt. And as you may have heard, this is the most powerful one of all. I remember when I first heard that, I thought, "What? It doesn't seem like it would be more powerful than desire or aversion." But it's the most powerful one because if it's not seen, if we identify with it, if we believe the doubt—the self-doubt about ourselves, about our practice, about the teachings, about the teachers—we'll stop our practice. We'll stop meditation. We'll leave. "I won't even do it. I'm out of here. I don't have the capacity to do this. I don't like these teachers anyhow. Was the Buddha even enlightened? Who knows if the Buddha was ever enlightened? It's all mythology. What are we doing here anyhow?"

"I'm not a good meditator. I never could meditate. I can't keep my attention here. I'm fed up. I don't have any capacity to do this practice." And we just leave. We stop.

It's a very complex mind state because it's a confused mind state, an indecisive mind state. "Well, should I

stay? Shouldn't I stay? Can I do it? Can't I do it? Maybe I can, but oh, it doesn't seem like I can." There's no real ground of our being. We feel very unsteady. We feel a bit lost, groundless in this mind state. There's no trust. There's no faith when this mind state is present—no faith in our own capacity to wake up, no faith even in the truth of liberation. Doubt is the opposite of faith. Faith in our capacities, in the teachings, in the teachers.

This is from Sharon Salzberg's book called *Faith*: "When we believe that our circumstances, inner and outer, will never change, and that there is nothing we can ever do to find love or peace again, our faith is consumed by hopelessness and doubt." When we really believe this, it can be so debilitating, really so painful—when we start to believe ourselves as so small and limited, really viewing and perceiving reality from this place of ego, this very small, narrow mind. From this location, we just don't see clearly. It's that muddy water.

And so it's so important to actually see doubt as doubt, to recognize it for what it is—which can be so slippery because when you're in doubt, again, it's hard to find that place where you're going to be mindful and attentive in a clear way. But if you can see it, then you can see that doubts are just thoughts, again, rising and passing. They have no real reality to them. They're just blips in the mind that we give so much power to. We make up a whole story about who I am and who I am in this world and my place in this world. And then we start to live our life from that story as if it's true.

We often don't actually doubt our doubt. This is the great doubt, the wholesome doubt that can doubt the unwholesome doubt. Bring in this skepticism that says, "Wait a minute, maybe that's not true. Maybe the way that I've been thinking about myself and my life and who I am in this world has just been a limited view"—like Sally was talking about, this cup that's half empty or half full. Which way are we looking at it?

Faith is what can dispel doubt. When we trust in our capacity, we trust in our goodness. We trust in the goodness of human beings. We trust in the wisdom of these teachings. We trust in others who have walked this path. This faith in what has gone before somehow cultivates a sense of faith in ourselves and what's possible. Which is partly our job too—we want to inspire faith in you so that you can have a ground to stand on and to wake up into the fullness of your own potential and your own capacity.

And practice itself is an antidote to doubt because it helps us see through the mind, the patterns of the mind. It gives us tools and a way to begin to examine what we've taken to be so true that actually may not be so true. So even being here, the practice and your dedication and willingness to look deeply into what's true is an antidote to the doubt. And the practice also invites a kind of surrender and letting go to what truly is, so that we're not as caught up in the figments of our imagination—piercing through our perception so that our perception is more accurate, as accurate as we may be able to get it through this practice of bare attention.

And as our concentration deepens and we're more immersed in our present experience as it is, there's really no space for doubt to arise. We are present and connected with reality as it is. We see. This is how it

is. "I'm feeling tired. I'm feeling agitated." Or "I'm feeling doubtful, but I see it." We're immersed in our experience, so there's no room for doubt to expand, for it to grow, because we see clearly as the concentration deepens. So these five difficult mind states—

I think that much of what we develop in our practice on a retreat is really how to work with these mind states. This is what we're working with—desire and aversion. We talk about paying attention to the attitudes of mind, how the mind moves in grasping towards the pleasant, pushing away the unpleasant. And then our ways of getting sleepy or dull or doubtful about our experience, and then the imbalances in our energy. We learn how to balance in skillful ways so that our energy doesn't get too strongly agitated or excited, but we're also not getting too passive or dull. All these ways that we begin to learn and work with in our practice—this is what we're learning and practicing here.

And probably you've heard through what I've been saying that as our meditation develops, the hindrances, or the way that they become obstacles in our practice, start to open up. Our concentration can deepen, and then these states of mind don't arise in the same way—maybe more subtly, or they disappear for some time. This allows our consciousness to be more refined, which brings forth more power and clarity and strength and brightness of mind, which then supports the deepening of insight so that we see things more clearly the way they are.

So these hindrances don't need to hinder our clear seeing. Really, we just want to see them for what they are. That's the first step—just see them for what they are. Just desire arising, aversion arising, sleepiness, restlessness, doubt. Or as our dear teacher Joseph would say, "Empty phenomena rolling on." Just the landscape of our mind.

May our wisdom and our compassion awaken.

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