# A Hidden Treasure: The Relationship with the Hindrances

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:03:06

Actually, what I want to do is talk about the hindrances, but let me address a couple of things first.

As I mentioned yesterday, teaching this retreat is quite challenging. There's so much I want to communicate—so much that feels important to communicate—because you're all in different places with different needs. I mentioned walking practice yesterday, and Derek just mentioned metta. I see a few people are doing metta as their basic practice, and you seem comfortable walking with that practice.

What I want to say about metta—and I'll talk about this more tomorrow—is that I want to introduce doing metta with energy body awareness. This means that whether I have phrases, visualizations, or whatever approach I'm using, I maintain this whole-body space awareness and never lose that sensitivity. So when I walk back and forth, I'm walking in that kind of awareness with the metta, however I'm practicing it. I'll elaborate on this tomorrow.

The second thing I want to clarify: I was quite rushed in the latter part of yesterday's talk, so I want to ensure something was clear. When I was discussing why we practice jhana and how we conceive of our reasons for doing jhana practice—and therefore what we emphasize—I don't want to replace other emphases or what other teachers might stress, like simplifying, laser-beam focus, or unwavering mind. I don't want to replace those reasons, but rather add to them.

All those emphases are important and can be highlighted at different times. I simply want to add something that's not often discussed but seems really important to me: these qualities of sensitivity, attunement, and refinement. I'm adding this to the possible reasons we're practicing and the possible emphases, allowing them to become more prominent or even the most prominent emphasis. I didn't mean we're discarding everything else—it's more a question of emphasis.

Now, what I want to talk about are the hindrances. There are several important points here.

Sometimes in the suttas, it's almost like a definition: with the abandoning of the hindrances, the first jhana arises. It's almost as if part of the definition of jhana is the absence of hindrances. It doesn't say "with unwavering concentration on this or that"—it says "with the abandoning of the hindrances." This is quite interesting and important, with clear implications for how we think about what we're doing here.

Part of what I want to say about the hindrances is this: it might sound like working with hindrances applies only pre-jhana, and it certainly does apply then—right from day one of anyone's meditation

practice. But not just then. Even once the jhanas, all eight jhanas perhaps, are accessible and become regular visitors or explorations—even once all that is up and running wonderfully—the hindrances will still arise at times. Absolutely.

What I want to add, and what's much less commonly discussed and acknowledged, is that they can arise very subtly. Subtle versions of them can arise in jhana as well. I use that word loosely, avoiding the silliness of an overly sharp definition of what is and isn't jhana. The point is about subtlety: even within jhana, subtle hindrances can be present. There's a sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya where the Buddha is teaching super advanced meditators—people doing all this remarkable work with psychic powers and such—and he's still discussing what subtle hindrances arise in that depth of samadhi.

So we need to understand that the hindrances are part of the deal. They're part of the deal when jhana feels like a million miles away. They're part of the deal once we have extensive experience in the jhanas—they'll keep coming and going. They're actually part of the deal in subtle ways, even in jhana, and therefore part of the work, part of the play, part of the whole. So when I say "jhana practice," I mean including the hindrances and all of that.

First, I want to say something about insight in relation to the hindrances. But let me quickly run through some antidotes to the hindrances, since much of this is probably familiar to you.

Before that, let's be clear about what "antidote" means: it's something we apply with a certain goal in mind. We want to eliminate something, like an antidote to an illness.

Let's hope to get rid of this illness.

Now, there are ways of practicing insight meditation where, when a hindrance comes up, the view is: "It's fine. It's just here. I just watch it. I do the same with a hindrance as I do with a non-hindrance or anything else. I'm just watching it. It's not better or worse. It's okay."

When you're doing jhana practice, that's not the attitude. We want antidotes and we want to work against the hindrances. This is primarily—even in the Satipatthana Sutta—the instruction of the Buddha. He's talking about what feeds the hindrances and what starves the hindrances. And we're clearly really interested in what starves the hindrances.

There's been a slight kind of tilting over the years in modern mindfulness teaching, but that other approach is still a valid way of working at times. But in samadhi practice, no—we've got a different relationship, a different attitude.

Again, watch out for the inertia, watch out for the habit. If you have a habit of just, "Oh, it's just a hindrance. I'll just sit it out. I'll just watch it. It's okay. It's fine"—we want to shake up that inertia a little bit, galvanize it.

They are going to come. There is no way they're not going to come. If you come into an interview and

report to me that you just didn't have any hindrances, I'd say you're not paying attention—because at least the subtle ones are going to come, no matter how much practice you've done. And usually, as I'll explain later, the not-so-subtle ones as well.

So, rattling through the antidotes. The two most common hindrances are probably—they're given usually in a certain order, but let's start with the two most common, which are sloth and torpor, and restlessness and worry.

I'm just going to throw out a bunch of antidotes. And if you think of one that I've forgotten that's actually really helpful, just shout it out. We'll put them all in a pot for everyone to use.

So sloth and torpor—getting sleepy is the extreme, the mind dull, the head nodding. But like all of these hindrances, it has a range: dullness, fogginess, sleepiness, lack of energy.

Expanding the awareness to the whole body. There's a reason why I say that over and over and over. It's so, so, so important. It will affect the mind. It's impossible—if you're really expanding the awareness and really filling it with attention—it's actually quite hard to be nodding. There's something about it that's the opposite movement. So expanding the awareness of the whole body and really filling it, again and again and again.

The in-breath has been mentioned as part of a couple of the guided meditations. The in-breath is naturally energizing. The out-breath is naturally relaxing. So if I need more energy, a bit more attention to the in-breath and a bit more attention to the energization of the in-breath is going to energize things.

A long breath—or longer breath or very long breath—will also energize. It will energize the body. You can think of it as oxygen or whatever, but if you think in energy terms, there's just more energy there, and that will energize the mind. So move to a long breath, if you're working with the breath, of course.

If you're working, let's say, with metta, then what's going to help? Could it be that going back in the categories to the easiest person might actually lighten things up, bring a bit of brightness just because the metta comes easily? Or might it be that going to the difficult person—because they're difficult and the challenge of it keeps you awake? Or might it be that expanding to all beings, partly because of the spatial expansion, which I'll come back to in a second?

So the question is: do I need to shift categories if I'm doing metta? And which way?

And it's not like it's always going to be this one that's going to help. So I have to have that willingness to respond and experiment.

More pegs. We talked about pegs in the counting. Bringing back those pegs really gives the mind something to focus on, keeps it busy. It literally keeps it up from sagging. With the numbers in the counting, they're like pegs. With the metta practice, if you're using phrases, the phrases are like pegs.

What can often be really helpful in the metta practice—so let's say your first two phrases are "may you be happy, may you be peaceful"—if the mind needs a bit more pegs, if it needs more energy, if it's getting lost, try "may you be happy, may you be happy, may you be peaceful, may you be peaceful." Each one twice. First one I'm not quite there, the second one I'm a bit more there. Small things like this can make a lot of difference.

You can also imagine your whole body filled with a bright white light, just like the sun. Really, really useful. Again, when the mind gets tired, it gets dark and foggy.

You can also open up the awareness very, very wide. So much wider than the energy body size, which is just a little bit bigger than the physical body. You can open it up to the size of this room—it's a lovely huge room—or even wider to the sky outside.

When we get tired, the mind shrinks. It's actually what we do when we curl up and go to sleep. The mind pulls in on itself in a way. So opening up that awareness—open your eyes, open up the awareness to have a sense of the whole room—you're encouraging the mind in the opposite direction from where it contracts as it falls asleep or gets tired. Tired mind is a small mind.

You can also sometimes just sweep through the body, paying attention to whatever sensations you feel there. Again, experiment. Is it more helpful right now with this hindrance to sweep really fast? Sometimes it is when we're tired. Just move the attention quite quickly. Maybe it's more helpful going up, or maybe down, or maybe both. Or maybe it might be helpful really slowly, really getting into the sensation. Again, you have to experiment.

Those are some antidotes for sloth and torpor. We really want to use these.

With restlessness—it's actually restlessness and worry, which refers to worry about ethical misdeeds that I'm worried I've done or someone's going to find out this or that, but we'll leave that aside for now—a lot of the remedies are interestingly quite similar.

More pegs can really help. If you're working with the breath, the long breath tends to really help with restlessness. Or it could be like we just did—there's a way, you find just a way of breathing or a way of construing the breath that just feels soothing. Maybe there's a place on your back and it's almost like someone just soothingly stroking your back, and that addresses the restlessness, it soothes the restlessness. So again, we can shape the breath with our imagination, the breath energy, and that can have a real effect on our energy.

Again, expanding the awareness to the whole body is useful for opposite hindrances. And again, the sweeping of the attention can be really helpful when there's restlessness.

One particular thing: if there's a lot of restlessness that is not so much mental but physical—in other words, it's not a lot of thought proliferation, but the body feels restless and the mind won't settle down

with that—then what can be really helpful is a really large awareness, as large as you can open it out. But within that, you have a job to do. The job is you let go of your primary base object and you become aware of the sensations of restlessness—the actual prickly kinds of feelings that arise and pass in the body.

In this big awareness, your job is completely allowing them. There'll be moment-to-moment arising, passing, unpleasant sensations, and you're completely welcoming them. So actually, technically what we're doing then is switching to what I would call a particular insight way of looking. But if you stay with that for a while, actually, for reasons I'll talk about later, it can settle the whole thing down.

The whole system settles down because we're in a very different relationship with the restlessness. When restlessness comes up, we have aversion to the restlessness. It's unpleasant, the very sense of restlessness, and that aversion to the restlessness feeds the whole thing. So when you go wide like that and come into a mode of completely allowing, completely welcoming, you're almost by definition quieting the aversion. We're practicing a non-aversive relationship. Do you understand? And it's that combination—the allowing and the spaciousness—that will really help you.

Stick with it, again and again. Actually, I remember playing with this years ago at home—restless, restless, sitting up doing that practice—and actually ending up sitting for three hours because that very approach just allowed everything to calm down completely. So all these techniques are quite powerful if we find the right way to work with them.

Now, the third hindrance: sense desire. It's usually listed first, but let me address it third. Let's talk about one particular kind of sense desire—sexual desire. Okay, there's desire for someone, whoever it is. You could go take a cold shower or whatever, but I'd like to offer this as a real possibility, especially as one develops more in meditation experience.

Often what happens is there's sexual desire and it goes to an image of having sexual contact in some way with this person or whatever it is. That's the bit that's not so helpful for samādhi. But the desire itself and the energy—there's a way of working with it.

For instance, here's the desire, and we've gone to the image already. Is it possible to feel the energy of sexual arousal? So I've got desire, I've got an image there—probably not in the imaginal sense, but an image there—and I've got sexual energy or arousal. Of course they're related. We could say you've got three things.

Of those three, if I can focus on and open to the energy—most people, the desire comes up, then the image comes up, then the feeling, and I'm lost in the image. I'm lost in chasing this sexual fantasy, embroiled in it. If I can focus more on the energy and actually open to it, allow that actual energy in the space of the energy body—actually, it feels good if it's not too tight. I open to it and I enjoy it.

It's actually quite close to pīti. It's quite close to that kind of good feeling. Oftentimes when people first experience pīti, they say, "Oh, it's like an orgasm" or similar. It doesn't have to be that intense, but there's a

similarity there.

So what you're really doing is approaching this more energetically, feeling it, opening to it, and kind of riding it in a way that allows it to shape into something that's a more pure energy, which is actually very conducive and helpful to where we're going—or similar to where we're going anyway. Does that make sense?

I wouldn't necessarily give that guidance to complete beginners, but you have had a lot of experience. So if that's the kind of desire coming up, that's one way of working with it. It can be very similar to pīti if I can filter things out and emphasize and open in the right way.

What about desire for food? Anyone have suggestions? Sitting here and you can't think of anything but lunch or tea—does that come up for anyone? Okay, not a problem.

Now, ill will and aversion. I split this hindrance into two parts. Ill will means actually getting really upset with someone, so much so that I wish them harm. For this, metta is the obvious antidote. Switch from whatever your base practice is—if breath is your base practice, just switch to metta. I need to deal with this ill will absolutely, because when that's there, it's really going to get in the way.

But there's another possibility within that category. When I have ill will toward someone or aversion toward someone—I just don't like them and the mind is in that kind of nasty state—what I can do is first think, "I'll give metta to that person," which is great. That might really help.

But there's a second possibility, which is to actually bring the attention back to myself without trying to change the ill will or how terrible this person is or those kinds of thoughts and feelings.

Bring the attention back to myself and actually notice and feel the dukkha of that ill will here. It's in my heart. There's a taste in my mouth. It's a flavor in my energy body and my consciousness. It's dukkha. It's painful. So I'm not trying to change the ill will. I just come back and feel what's happening. Don't judge. Just what does it feel like? Oh, it's dukkha. And feel the pain of it. I just have to let my consciousness touch the pain there.

If I'm doing that, if I'm just letting it touch it, then what can happen is when I touch that pain, when I come into contact, it turns into compassion for myself. Self-compassion. You think, "Yeah, but my problem's with the other person." It doesn't matter. Once there's self-compassion, there's compassion. It's a new energy in the system and it will soften everything. So my self-compassion starts changing my relationship with this other person. Do you understand? That's really useful as well.

What can also happen and what you will notice happening over the course of the retreat is that we get aversive at certain noises—the heating, or the birds in the rooks, which are a lot quieter than they used to be ten or fifteen years ago for some reason. It's like, "Oh those crows are so loud," or whatever it is. I'm trying to meditate and they're bothering me. Or this person—every time they get up, their bones creak,

like my bones creak, or their breathing. Aversion at noise, which could include aversion at a person or another sentient being or whatever it is. This is going to be really common.

I have to remember the big picture, the goal. Where am I going in practice? I'm certainly not going towards more aversion. I'm going towards less aversion. That's what I want. It's not even jhana as my primary goal. It's less aversion, less kilesa, freedom from the defilements. Just to remind myself, I want to get to a place where there's less aversion, I'm less bothered by noise. I'm more open, there's more love, etc.

So again, what does that imply about how I should practice the jhanas? And what kind of way I'm holding and my view of the whole thing? Is it possible? Can I find a way of practicing the jhanas that is not so bothered—that kind of includes sounds and coming and going and noises? Not bothered, but not throwing out the baby with the bath water and saying, "Oh, I don't need to make an effort then." There's some attitude, view, or stance here that's really possible.

Sometimes what you can actually do is deliberately let the primary object go and open up more to sound and a sense of really including that. And that very action—again, I'm doing the opposite thing of aversion. I'm opening to sound and including it. I'm not saying that's other than what I'm trying to do. I'm opening to sound and including it. Then that starts changing the way I feel about the sound and inside. Then within that, keeping that openness, I can reintroduce the primary object. I've got it in a much bigger space and a much bigger attitude, a much bigger orientation.

Technically, we'll get to this when we talk about the second jhana, but actually, technically, if in any moment you could just quite significantly turn down any aversion in the mind, you would come very close to the second jhana. Sukha would arise. Happiness would arise. With a lot of practice—well, actually, maybe this is one of those things: just try. Just try. Some people say, "Okay, just turn down the aversion."

What do you mean turn down? I don't know how to do that. Just try. Just try to turn down the aversion because turning down the aversion can then directly give rise to happiness, give rise to sukha.

*Working with Doubt*

Okay, last one: doubt. We can doubt the teacher, we can doubt the teachings, and we can doubt ourselves. There's probably lots of other stuff, but those are the three common ones.

So what's the difference between questioning and doubt? Doubt often involves an absence of questioning, in fact, or an absence of letting questions blossom and grow into an inquiry that's actually helpful. Doubt tends to paralyze. We get stuck in a kind of confusion. We're not actually questioning anything. The mind is just shuttling back and forth or going around in a circle.

Sometimes underneath all that, there's actually a question or two or three that need to get clarified and formulated and perhaps asked to oneself or to a teacher. But we haven't let the question form yet. And we're just stuck in this kind of unclear shuttling back and forth.

So is there a question there? Once we've got a question, it's no longer paralyzing. Even formulating it clearly will help. We'll feel unparalyzed. And then formulating and asking and engaging will be really helpful. But doubt paralyzes.

Just one thing to bear in mind is timing here. When am I going to wrestle with this either question or doubt? Outside of the meditation is the answer. In other words, yeah, there's something I'm really not sure about. I'm confused. I have a question. I can't proceed until I have an answer. This is my meditation time, so I'm just going to put that aside, but I promise you, mind, that I will get to this question and I will think about it, I'll ponder it, I'll inquire, I'll ask someone later. So you make a deal with the mind. It's like, we're going to get to this. I'm not ignoring it, but it happens outside of the formal practice.

*The Practice of Exchanging Happiness*

How many people have heard of the practice of exchanging the happiness of self and other? Few of you. There's, again, a huge, huge practice, infinite possibilities. I think there's quite a large section about it in the book I wrote, *Seeing That Frees*. So at some point you can visit that.

I want to say it's a really, really beautiful practice. It's one of the most gorgeous explorations you can do as a meditator and full of creative possibilities and lovely, luscious possibilities of transformation.

In a nutshell: Here I am, pretty miserable from some hindrance attack or whatever, and I say to myself, you know what? I'll take this. I will take this because somewhere, someone else, maybe someone I know, maybe someone I don't know and will never know, somewhere else, correspondingly by magic, I'm taking their dukkha and they can have the happiness.

So again, technically you could say, well, what am I doing there? Instead of the automatic natural aversion to the hindrances, I'm actually saying, come, come, I take this, but it has heart in it. It has this: I'm willing to take this suffering right now. I'm opening myself to suffer for the sake of the release from suffering of someone else somewhere.

So it's a kind of magical thinking. It doesn't matter—using your imagination. There's all kinds of variations on that with emptiness and stuff, but that's the nutshell of it. It's a very beautiful thing.

Often what happens with the hindrances around is there's no heart as well. Everything's got squeezed miserable and there's no heart. So one possibility is bringing the heart in that very beautiful way.

So you could do that with physical discomfort as well. I can take this pain right now. I will take this pain right now.

I'm willing to take this pain for the sake of someone else's ease, someone else's well-being.

I'm moving pretty quickly here—is this pace okay for everyone? We need to get clear about several important aspects of the hindrances.

One crucial point is that there are subtle hindrances as well as the obvious ones. Most people are familiar with really gross hindrances—these are generally what we're taught about when we first hear about the five hindrances on insight retreats. But the hindrances also manifest very, very subtly.

There's a sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya where the Buddha discusses subtle hindrances specifically. He lists things like elation and inertia, fear, slight over-efforting, slight under-efforting—very, very slight forms. Desire, if it's not handled well. Perception of multiplicity and paying too much attention to different things. There's a whole list there.

The point is there's a complete range of subtlety. In a way, there's always something to play with and work with, something that can be tweaked a little bit. Of course, sometimes in jhana practice all of this settles and we're not actually aware of any hindrances—and that's fine. You don't have to go looking for them at that point. You just get into the enjoyment of it.

As you move deeper into jhana territory, you start to realize the more subtle hindrances that might be present at times—ones you don't initially notice. It's not that we're always looking for hindrances in jhana practice. We're actually inclining more toward what's pleasant and easeful and enjoyable. But they will arise subtly.

Are you okay for a bit more? Do you have the energy?

Let me point out something else that I want to return to throughout the retreat and emphasize quite a lot. It's something that becomes clearer through jhana practice than through insight and mindfulness practice alone—a very common micro-negativity of the mind.

You might be sitting there with a very nice energy body, with pīti, with whatever qualities are present. You might be quite used to it by that point, but it's still quite pleasant. Most people would give their right arms for what you're experiencing in that moment. But you've experienced this before, and the other day it was better than today. You know it can be a bit better.

In this very subtle way, the mind inclines toward what's wrong, what's not quite as good as it should be. Part of this is natural—it's part of the shaping process. It's like the potter with clay on the wheel, noticing where it needs adjustment and applying gentle pressure.

But when this has a flavor of negativity, when it carries that negative quality—we're talking about something that can get incredibly subtle. It's the glass half-empty rather than half-full perspective, but on a really, really subtle level. In this moment, there's something in the way I'm seeing and relating to this actually lovely experience, and I'm somehow spinning it with negativity, seeing it through a negative lens.

This is incredibly common. We might call it a really deep, almost base-level kilesa—a defilement of aversion in the mind. You'll notice this more and more as practice develops, and it's actually really important to address and work with.

The good news is that we notice this much more clearly in jhana practice. You might think you'd notice it more in mindfulness and insight practice, but you actually observe it much more in jhana practice. You get much closer to it, see it operating on much subtler levels, and you're able to do something about it.

What I want to emphasize right now—and I'll repeat this—is that we simply notice it. Expect it, notice it, then find the pleasure and get into enjoying it. Find what's nice and get into enjoying it. We make a micro-movement, a micro-shift of relationship and attitude. We're talking about countering a micro-subtle defilement with an equally subtle shift.

In a way, we could construe this pattern as a subtle hindrance in itself.

In terms of subtle hindrances, there are also two forms called sinking and drifting. I don't know where these terms originate...

I don't know if they're originally in the Buddha. I've never come across them in the Buddha, but I picked them up from, I think it was Kamalashila, I can't remember, but they're around now in Dharma culture.

So drifting and sinking, what does that mean? Drifting is a sort of subtle version of restlessness. Really what it means is the mind is still alive. You're still mindful. You're nowhere near jumping out of your skin or obsessed with worrying. The mind is present, everything's good, it's kind of with its object, but there's just a bit more tendency for it to drift off the object. Sometimes it manifests as a bit more thoughts and images in the mind and a little more tendency for the mind to get pulled off into them. So again, we're talking about something quite subtle.

Sinking is the subtle version of sloth and torpor. Again, nowhere near nodding or falling asleep. It's just a little bit of dullness comes in, a little bit of—it's not quite so present, so alive, so bright, so sharp.

These are interesting hindrances because oftentimes what they're most related to is effort levels. Again, we're back to this question, this issue of effort levels and the fact that I cannot avoid that issue. I cannot avoid that parameter of practice. As you get deeper and deeper in samadhi, a tiny bit too much effort, just a little bit too much effort, a little bit too little effort makes proportionately more of a difference and more of an impact. In other words, again, the deeper we go, the more sensitive the whole system is and a bit too much effort, a bit less effort actually gets in the way or has more of an effect at a deeper level.

So with these subtle hindrances, sinking and drifting, one of the things that's really worth paying attention to is just the effort levels and seeing: what is it just to back off the intensity? Or perhaps to move from, in my directionality, perhaps from more of a probing to more of a receiving?

What I wanted to say is either sinking or both sinking and drifting can arise from either too much effort—very slightly—or too little effort, paradoxically sounding. We don't know. What do you have to do? You have to just get in there and play. Play with that subtle effort: bit more, bit less, bit more intense, bit less intense, bit more probing, bit more receiving, bit more delicate, whatever it is.

Sometimes one of the ways I like to think about this is, for example, with the drifting—why is there more thought? Why does the mind go off? We're squeezing the mind too tight, and in a completely incommensurate image, it's a bit like squeezing a banana skin and the banana comes shooting out. Maybe that's not the greatest analogy. But again, going back to what we said before, the whole body can reveal the effort, even just the size of the attention can also affect this. So there's lots of things to try, but one main point to take is the spectrum.

When we're talking about hindrances, we're really talking about a spectrum, despite what the Buddha said: "With the abandonment of the hindrance, with seclusion from the hindrances arises the first jhana." Yes, that's true. And at another level, we're talking about a whole spectrum here that's not going to go away in one form or another.

Sometimes, even in jhana—again, using that word in a slightly loose way—you can be here with the happiness, here's the brightness, the luminosity and the happiness, and it's as if at the edges of that happiness and brightness, there's like a whole little pack of little terrier dogs yapping away. And it's not that they're in the middle causing mayhem or really loud, but you're just aware of them there.

Are you in the jhana? Are you out of the jhana? It's an irrelevant question. Where's the intelligence here? The question is: what do I need to do at that point? What needs to happen? What do I need to pay attention to?

Let's say here's this luminous happiness right there. Here are these little terriers yapping. I'm just going to get more into that happiness and illuminate it, open my body to it, open my mind to it. We'll talk about all this. Now, it might be that in doing that, the terriers nicely quiet down and fall asleep, but it might be they stay there and actually that's as good as it's going to get right now.

Okay, so I've got this really nice, lovely, yummy, juicy happiness, which the person who gave their right arm for would now give their left arm as well for. The terriers are there. It's not a problem. Just get into it and enjoy it. Don't worry about this in and out business. It's just how not to consume the mind with questions that are not relevant.

But also, sometimes the terriers are yapping, and I'm kind of into it. Let me go to the terriers, see what they need, and see if I can do something that encourages them to do something else. It's not like there's always a formula, but one formula is: it's okay. This is the deal right now. This is as good as it's going to get. Make sense?

Sometimes there are hindrances in different forms. Sometimes a hindrance arises—is it a hindrance? No, it's just that the energy body feels a little constricted or blocked. I'm not obsessed with this. I'm not thinking about that. I'm not lost in desire or doubt or any of that. It just feels a little bit blocked.

So we could call that a subtle hindrance if you want. Or it's just that the energy body kind of won't settle down or the citta won't really settle down. It's not even from gross distraction or thought. It's just

something like a little agitation in the energy of the citta or the body.

That's a bit like the yapping terriers. Sometimes—and again, this is something that may be relevant for some of you now, or will be for some of you later—sometimes it's amazing if you have quite a lot of experience in and out of jhāna: you can just dive underneath something. Here it's blocked or it doesn't feel right, something's not settled. Like I said, it's a bit like the radio frequencies or the wardrobe. The jhānas are there anyway and you can kind of just point the mind to a level that's actually really peaceful.

Now, it might not be pristinely, wonderfully, radiantly, overwhelmingly peaceful, but there's something that you recognize: well, that's the kind of peace that belongs to the third jhāna, let's say. I recognize that peacefulness. And you point the mind—you just dive underneath a little bit. It's there. And then I'm tuning to that. I'm not getting caught up. Yes, this part of the body doesn't feel quite connected or feels a bit constricted or the mind's not so settled. I'm just pointing to that. I dive into it.

And then what's my work there? I've dived in. Now I'm in touch with that peacefulness. Now what? Now I need to work with that, get into it, enjoy it, open to it, focus on it, etc. We'll talk about more of that.

So it's not really that the jhāna is quite there, but something of a doorway to that, something of a trail of that jhāna is there and you can pick it up and just kind of point the mind there and dive into it with practice, with time. Once you get that trail opening, then you work on staying there and stabilizing and absorbing into that, et cetera.

As I said, with jhāna practice, we really want this attitude of working with, working against, if you like, the hindrances. We really want this idea of antidote, but we also really want this idea of patience. So there's a battle. I'm patient while I'm working with. It's really important. I'm playing with and experimenting with all that. And I can use all my ingenuity and creativity in how I relate to hindrances or what might help. And at the same time, I have a firm resolve. I'm not just going to give up now. I'm not just going to get up and walk away or just sit through it and say, "Oh, whatever, who cares?"

So there's this combination of working actively, of being creative and ingenious, and a firm resolve and patience altogether. It's not that we want to get kind of locked into a grim battle for hours on end with some hindrance or another. At a certain point, it's like: all right, you win the battle. You're not going to win the war, but you win this battle. I'm going for a walk or I'm going for a cup of tea or something. Part of that is also just taking the pressure off and opening the mind. If I go for a walk, it's like the beauty, the air, the light, the spaciousness. I hope by the end of this retreat that everyone knows the beauty of rain, because you get a lot of practice with that.

There's no reason that so-called bad weather shouldn't affect your sense of beauty.

In a way, what we're doing is emphasizing the cultivation of well-being rather than fighting the hindrances. We're doing both, but it's a certain way of thinking about the balance.

For those of you who have accumulated more experience, after you've practiced across different jhanas, you sometimes develop a sense of what's possible in any given moment. Maybe you're working in the fourth jhana, that's your playground, but there are hindrances present and you find yourself stuck in the first or second jhana. You just get a sense: "No, I can stay with this and shape it, and it will deepen." Other times you sense: "This is as good as it's going to get right now." After a while, you develop this intuitive feel. That takes practice.

Still, that's great. That's really good. Even if there's just a subtle hindrance blocking you from going as deep as you've gone before—no problem. You take what you can get, what's accessible, and develop a sense of what's possible in any particular situation.

To finish, let me share some insights about the hindrances themselves.

First, the hindrances exist on spectra. They're not simply on or off switches. Each hindrance has a spectrum ranging from really gross manifestations to increasingly subtle ones. Understanding this is crucial territory for practice.

This has several implications. The hindrances will be regular visitors, coming and going. If I hold the view that they shouldn't arise, or that they won't appear after a certain amount of practice, or that once I reach a particular jhana they'll disappear—that's the opposite of insight. That's delusion. True insight recognizes their spectral nature, which means in one form or another, at some level of grossness or subtlety, they will continue arising.

Second, the process isn't linear. Yes, the hindrances will come and go, and they'll continue appearing even after you develop access to whatever jhana becomes part of your practice. You might have a much harder time with hindrances later in a retreat than you did earlier. You might feel: "I've reached this jhana, everything was going so well," and then suddenly find yourself in what feels like a hell realm.

I've said this in many other talks, but if someone comes to me describing their samadhi practice as this smooth, uninterrupted ascent day by day into the heavenly realms—a linear graph of continuous progress—either they're not being truthful or they're really not paying attention. The actual trajectory looks more like this: up and down, with an overall trend perhaps, but full of peaks and valleys. Just because we've had wonderful experiences for five days with new territories opening up doesn't mean we won't fall into a hindrance hole tomorrow.

Third, we want to cultivate a relationship with the hindrances where we're not taking them personally. They're simply aspects of being human until, apparently, one becomes an arahant—fully enlightened. When I say "not taking it personally," I mean not thinking: "Oh, I'm a bad meditator," or worse, "I'm a bad person because I keep experiencing aversion or desire or greed."

The hindrances are facts of human existence. Their arising doesn't reflect on my capability as a meditator or my worthiness as a human being. This understanding is crucial. Jhana practice offers the gift of helping

us see, over time, that these experiences aren't personal. We want to actively encourage this perspective of not taking the hindrances personally.

Fourth, we want to increasingly believe less and less in the stories the hindrances create. Over time, we become less convinced by their narratives. What happens is a hindrance arises and spins a story—convincing us that it's actually about this person, that they are the problem rather than recognizing it as our own hindrance pattern. Or it weaves stories about ourselves...

And then, and oftentimes it spins this whole *parpancha* thing—that whole proliferation.

Actually what's happening is a seed of a hindrance arose, which is what happens for human beings: hindrances just keep coming up. Defilement seeds, *kilesa* seeds—greed, aversion, delusion—in one form or another, manifest as the hindrances. They're little seeds. And then without wisdom and mindfulness, those seeds become huge trees, forests, jungles. Jungles, better.

We want to get in there and prevent what allows them to become jungle. Partly what allows them to become a jungle—those seeds—is believing them. Believing what they tell us. Believing the perceptions. Believing the stories that they spin.

This is so crucial. As I said, if nothing else happened on the retreat—you didn't have a millisecond of an ounce of a nice feeling—but *that's* what happened on the retreat, that would be really, really good. That would make a huge difference in your life. Huge difference.

And the fifth insight piece is that we get to view the hindrances in relation to what I just said. We actually view the hindrances—yeah, they're really unpleasant—but in a way they're kind of like gold dust or gold ore. There's something really precious here. I just need to find the right relationship with it. I can turn it into treasure if I find the right relationship with it in terms of view and wisdom.

So they're really like gold dust, like something unrefined and filled with all kinds of not so great stuff. But actually there's a treasure there.

Because as I said, hindrances will come up in life. It's not just something in meditation we think about. What about that creative project? What about that service project? What about your work? What about coming up in long-term relationship? Same things arise, the same hindrances arise, and they will hinder. *Nivarana* is the Pali—it literally means something that's an obstacle, gets in the way of a going forward. They will do that in all of those other realms of our life. It's not just something about meditation.

If I can get wise to them, if I can learn how to view them in a way that they lose their power—they might still arise as seeds, but they lose their power—that's absolutely huge and absolutely precious.

Part of that is also I begin to understand something about emotions as well. This is really interesting: something that seemed like it's this emotion that I'm feeling, I actually see, oh, sometimes it's actually just a seed of a hindrance. And the mind has spun that into a story, and a certain emotion has arisen. But

actually, in its root, it was just this hindrance, or mostly this hindrance, sometimes. So there's something about understanding the hindrances that is actually really important in understanding our emotional life.

The fact that they're spectra—there's a range—this is part of this development of subtlety, because I recognize they're going to get more subtle. My attention has to get more subtle to even pick up on subtle hindrances and then work with them.

When we talked yesterday about how I would say it's so important—this development of subtlety and refinement and discrimination—that also happens in regard to the hindrances. So in terms of our overall trajectory, this recognition and working with the subtlety of the spectrum of the hindrance is also part of that whole development of subtlety.

Yes, it's much nicer attuning and discerning to subtle differences of this kind of exquisite peacefulness versus that kind of exquisite peacefulness. But in terms of developing the whole subtlety again, which is so important for our emotional life and all the rest of it, that's important too. It's all subtlety. It's all discrimination. It's all attunement.

In terms of not taking hindrances personally and not believing them—can you hear that? That's about letting go. It's about having insight into what they are. I see what you are and I let go. I'm no longer dragged along by this story or this identification. There's a letting go.

This is insight.

One last thing. If you engage deeply with jhana practice over time, you may begin to notice what appears to be a kind of backlash. It's as if your practice is going really well—perhaps even opening into new territory. You enter a new opening, a new state, some wonderful development happens. You rest in this for a while, whether that's a few hours, half a day, or several days. And then all hell breaks loose.

Sometimes it can seem as though the very opening itself caused this backlash, as if there was some kind of reaction to the breakthrough. This isn't something to expect every time, but there does seem to be this pattern for many practitioners.

This phenomenon raises important questions. Should we expect it? Remember—don't take it personally. The path isn't linear. But is there some kind of catharsis happening here, some form of purification?

I know people who hold exactly this view—that jhana practice allows a kind of karmic purification of our sankaras and emotions. While I don't want to rule this out entirely, I would approach it more cautiously. I prefer to hold both views: yes and no.

If I step back from this question, what we're really after is range. Remember when I said I want you to have range? We want this range in relationship to our emotions—range in the ways of working with them, in the ways of viewing them. I would like you to have a really expansive range. "I can work with emotions in many different ways. I can view emotions in many different ways. And I have access to a whole

spectrum of emotional experience."

However, with sustained jhana practice over time—if we allow this practice to give rise to insight—we begin more and more to recognize the fabricated nature of emotions. Yes, an emotion is a real thing. It arises by itself. It's there, and we must deal with that reality. But over time, it becomes almost undeniable that an emotion is a fabrication. Without us doing something—usually unconsciously—it cannot arise as that particular emotion. It cannot get fabricated, cannot get constructed.

So in the Buddha's words, we see a hindrance as a hindrance, not necessarily as an emotion. We recognize what's there. It's a fabrication, or in other language, it's actually empty. An emotion is empty.

But remember what I said on the first night—I can see an emotion as empty and I can see it as real. I'm not parking in either view exclusively. I have the possibility to shift between perspectives. To me, this flexibility is absolutely crucial.

Often people park in one view and that becomes their fixed position. For me, it would be catastrophic and tragic to only ever view emotions as fabrications. I would never want to be limited to just that perspective.

But when both views become available, then the view of catharsis—"Yes, something is purifying here, I may not even know what, but I sit through it as a purification"—becomes one possible stance and relationship. Or the view that it's not catharsis at all, that emotions are fabrications requiring investigation—this too becomes available. Both perspectives coexist.

Yet as we practice jhanas more and more, we begin to see a hindrance as a hindrance, as the Buddha might say. What happens is not linear—it's very much up and down—but there is a movement over time with jhana practice.

What might initially manifest as papañca—extreme agitation, complete lostness in story, believing everything, self-view and all that—actually begins to manifest less as papañca and more as pure hindrance. Over time, there's a kind of sifting away, a filtering out of the more papañca-generating elements of the mind. What remains is simply the hindrance itself.

And it becomes—it's still quite strong, I might be really quite restless in the body, but there's no story attached to it. There's no lostness. So what was usually papancha becomes more just—I'm just dealing with the hindrance now.

And then over time, even the hindrances themselves tend to become more and more subtle, though they're still there. So there is, over a long time of jhana practice, this movement of shaving away the gross, getting down to the hindrances and then even more subtle. But they stay—they're part of the deal. And we need to be okay with that, really up for that.

I was going to take some questions, but I think we already had a couple and it's probably enough now. So let's just sit for a minute together.

Thank you, everyone. Enjoy tea. Enjoy your evening practice. And I think there are a few interviews this evening, so just check that that's not you if you haven't already. See you tomorrow.

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