

# Les Cinq Obstacles (The Five Hindrances)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · International Talks · 48:22

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*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.*

Homage to the Buddha, the noble blessed one, fully awakened by himself.

So this evening, I thought we could explore the five hindrances a little better and speak a bit about the seven factors of enlightenment. I thought that was the Christmas... the beautiful jingle bells.

So the Buddha spoke of defilements. The Buddha talked about obstacles. No, no, defilements. What are defilements? Some might ask, what does that mean? Purity? No, no, it's *kilesa*. There must be a Pali scholar here. No. *Kilesa* is... *kilesa*. Yes, it's... okay. Ah yes, you're right.

So *kilesa* refers to all the things that are impure in us. No, sorry, not impure. That are non-beneficial, precisely. We always use non-moralising terms. We need to keep these terms. Later in the Buddha's life, they began to construct ten of these defilements. So in the later life of the Buddha, well in the end of the Buddha's life, they transformed this into ten impurities, let's say, that's the term I think. Ah, ten. Ten, yes.

But of course, there are numerous defilements. But of course, there are countless numbers of them. This is what we experience during the day. And there's also the understanding that there are therefore... impurities, if someone finds a better term, impurities that are constantly underneath there, energetically. So there's the conception of a kind of unconscious in Buddhist teachings.

But knowing these lists is not particularly useful. Well, knowing the list of these impurities that have been catalogued is not particularly helpful. But when it comes to teachings on how one can and should practise, the list is different. And that's the five hindrances.

So the five hindrances are much easier to remember than the ten impurities and the ten potential impurities. For those of you who know Pali, *kilesa* and *anusaya*.

So these hindrances clearly separate for us the different types of impurities we have, of difficulties.

So the first hindrance is all the desires we have. Now, if you're sitting here and suddenly a desire arises in your mind. For example, you have a desire that overwhelms you to visit the United Kingdom. Yes, and you're in England and there's no rain and everybody's beautiful.

So when you wake up, you say, ah, you see, planning, planning. So now, you have to come back to the body and feel this desire inside. This desire is a potential energy. And it only takes a moment of inner

tension and it takes you again inside. And it only needs a second, a hundredth of a second of inattention and bang, you're in the United Kingdom.

So when you feel this desire, when you sense this desire, you must stay with it. And this is where notation, mental notes can be of great help. Because you can tell yourself continuously: desire, desire, desire. And this occupies the mind and intellect. But your attention is on the sensations linked to desire in the body. And you must be aware of this compulsion to return to daydreaming.

So you must wait until little by little this disappears. And each time you do this, you undermine this compulsive desire to visit the United Kingdom. Unfortunately! So it's really important that we stay with the desire until it disappears completely, until it dies totally.

And the reason is because when the desire has disappeared completely, it's not that the energy has disappeared, that it's been wasted. Actually, systematically, it turns into its opposite. There's always a transformation. And when this desire is completely finished, you can experience this magnificent sense... and when this desire is completely finished, you will probably experience contentment.

And this is a touch, a hint of the Buddha's mind. The Buddha's mind is in a state of perpetual contentment. Someone complained to the Buddha. They said to him, this training you're making us do is very hard. And the Buddha said, yes, but in the end, you reach nirvana. Yes, but they replied, yes alright, but in the end you realise liberation, you reach nirvana. And the question is, nirvana, so what?

And so when you have reached nirvana, said the Buddha, actually, you are in contentment and happy with that. Ah! *Tuṭṭhi ca sukhaṃ vihāti*. That's the power. *Tuṭṭhi ca sukhaṃ vihāti*. In company, that's it. *Tuṭṭhi ca sukhaṃ vihāti*. Tutti frutti. All the fruits are there of your practice.

So when we experience the end of desire and this state of peaceful contentment, this is exactly where we wish to go, where we are going, we are heading towards this state. And no matter the desire, the technique is always the same. So the technique is always the same thing.

So step out of the flow of daydreaming, of desire, etc. Be well aware of what's happening, come back to the body and stay with what's there in the body until it disappears.

Unfortunately, if we don't do this, this desire begins to grow. It's a mistake of someone who has practised a lot. There's a little bit of laziness that arrives in the practice, sometimes after quite long practices, if one has been practising for a long time. There's not enough effort to stay with this desire. And because there's not this effort, there's this moment of inattention. And suddenly, you're going to return to the United Kingdom. And if you don't watch it, you're going to spend an hour in the United Kingdom. You'll be in the United Kingdom in your head.

So sometimes this requires real effort to stay there with what's happening. And then now of course there's the other side, all these things we don't like.

So for example, we have anger. The thing that happens with anger is that we like being angry. We like shouting at others. It's fun. If you could even hit them, that would be even better. There's a cruelty that's underneath this anger, this hatred. And there, it's the same thing as any desire. You have to do the same thing.

Now, anger is a very difficult mental state to stay with. There's sometimes even more energy in anger than in desire. And sometimes, when your mind wanders, you have to be very clear. What is it that you are? What prevents anger? And sometimes, when your mind wanders, you have to be very clear about what gives juice to your anger. What's behind your anger?

Is it, for example, something that resembles resentment? It's because you don't want to forgive. And sometimes, you hear people say, I can't forgive. But of course everyone can forgive everyone. So when someone says I can't forgive everyone... and so when someone says I can't forgive this, they're behaving like a small child.

When a child doesn't want to go to bed and wants to stay up, they say I can't sleep. But really, I don't want to sleep. But in truth, it's rather "I don't want to sleep, I'm not going to sleep." In reality, someone who says "I can't forgive" means "I don't want to forgive, I'm not going to forgive."

So it could not have been an absolutely conscious decision. Because it may be that this isn't an entirely conscious decision, this one of not forgiving. Because a certain number of our habits come from our childhood, from our early childhood.

For example, we find people who chain together romantic relationships. And we find that actually, very often, they say "it's their fault." And if they wake up, maybe they'll realise "maybe it's me, actually." There's a lot of our character and our personality that we're not entirely conscious of.

One of the impurities that's really difficult to accept is the quality of jealousy. Sometimes, we happen to say, I envy this person. But in reality, when we look more carefully, we're jealous of this person. Because jealousy wants what it wants. Wanting what they want, or wanting what they get, or... No, wanting, sorry, yes, wanting what they have, excuse me.

Okay, because jealousy is wanting what the other has. And hating them for having it. But it also means that I'm inferior to them. And that's difficult for us to accept.

So all these subtle obstacles, they begin to manifest if we have sufficient openness to see them. So for example, I don't believe there exists a single person in a single society in the world who has no prejudice. So we'll find, for example, prejudices linked to age, gender, sexuality, race.

Now, if we deny it, if we say "Oh no, no, I don't have prejudices," we'll never truly open and be able to purify ourselves. So if we're in denial of the fact that we too have prejudices, then we'll never be capable of opening to these prejudices and purifying ourselves of them.

I've noticed that these days, certain parliamentarians try to make it easier for people to accept this. I've noticed that nowadays, certain speakers do their utmost to make it much more acceptable to others to have prejudices. They call this biases. You can have a bias towards your race, your gender, your class, being disabled or not, etc. We have biases. That is, where we come from.

So this term bias, it suggests that these are only potentialities. It's only when you activate them through thought, speech and action that they become prejudices. But all this must be purified through the heart. And this cannot be purified except in consciousness.

And so when we become aware of something and we give it its true name and say this, this is a prejudice. And when we come inside ourselves, we must stay with this difficult mental state. And you must accept the feeling of... we must accept the feeling, the energy of shame and guilt associated with having prejudices.

We thought we had no prejudice and suddenly we realise we have prejudices inside us. And when we have an open heart to this, we're much more prompt to notice in our daily life the existence of these prejudices inside us. And because we're conscious of them, we can let them disappear. And in this way, we surely and certainly undermine these negative mental states.

And so all this relates to the quality, the characteristic of aversion. And we can also include anxiety and fear. Anxiety and fear are also feelings, energies that are very difficult to feel. We'd rather call a friend, turn on the TV, anything. And the feeling of isolation too.

So if you stay with these mental states until they disappear completely, you'll see the transformation. You'll be surprised that fear, when it ends, transforms into love. It turns into love. And the same thing with the feeling of isolation, of loneliness.

So if you stay with the feeling of isolation until it disappears... and painful. But you must stay until the end, of course, until it disappears, for there to be this moment of turning around. This doesn't mean that if you don't stay until the end, the transformation doesn't happen. But seeing this moment of transformation, this gives you confidence in the practice. And it's through this process that there's purification of the heart.

So in psychotherapeutic language, this is purification. And so in therapeutic, psychotherapeutic language, this is called healing.

And the next is what my teacher called our two good friends. So torpor and lethargy. These little voices that say you need to rest. Just ten minutes. Just ten minutes.

So this is to be distinguished, of course, from true fatigue. Of course, this is to be distinguished from genuine fatigue. And where does this desire to sink into annihilation come from? So we mentioned this morning... no suffering.

So sometimes, when we're too depressed, when things become too difficult, we try to suppress ourselves.

Suppressing ourselves is a little suicide. More precisely, getting rid of all feeling of the self, so being in oblivion, is a little suicide.

There's also another reason why we develop this desire. It's because when we wake up, for example on the weekend, we turn over in bed and... oh excuse me, we turn over in bed and then we fall asleep again, then you roll over for a bit more roasting, so we turn over in bed for a bit more roasting like in cooking, for a bit of browning ourselves a little. Ah then you wake up, we wake up, we see what time it is and off we go, we start again.

So it's a little subliminal level, very pleasant, of being not quite awake, not quite asleep. But what we experience in meditation is the heaviness of this. And so the compulsion to fall asleep. And this is in our psyche. And this cannot be liberated until it reaches consciousness, as long as we haven't reached consciousness.

That's why we must stay alive. So if there's lethargy in the head, we must continuously move inside the head. This is an act of intention. So each time you move your attention, it's an act of intention. And so it's a way of strengthening one's capacities, one's power. So this gives attention a bit more energy to stay awake.

And you'll be surprised. You can wake up like a lamp of light in this gentle atmosphere. And you'll be surprised, you could wake up like a lighthouse or a brilliant light in this atmosphere of lethargy. When consciousness becomes completely detached from this sense of lethargy. And this allows this bad energy to exhaust itself. And this allows this negative energy to exhaust itself.

And it's the same with feeling heavy in the body. So in these cases, you must do body scanning starting from the feet towards the head, because this awakens the energy, it brings it up. And discover where it is that you feel tired and compressed. Maybe you'll have the surprise of finding a lot of fatigue in your legs. And in the body, in the chest.

But you must tell me if you've found fatigue at the tip of your nose. I've never felt tired at the tip of my nose. So putting your attention on something that's not tired allows you to wake up a little. And by putting your attention on a part of the body that's not fatigued then this allows you to wake up a little and then to feel this heaviness, and we have a lot of it in our system, it's a very big obstacle.

The fourth hindrance is restlessness. It's either the mind that's very agitated, that goes crazy. And sometimes, it's to such a point that we can think we're going crazy ourselves. And the body can also be full of agitation.

And so when the mind is very agitated, you must be very patient and spend your time returning to the body. And with the body, again, you can go down the body feeling this agitation. So with the body, in this case, we can start from the top of the body to go back down and feel the agitation in the body.

And in this category, there are also the side effects that come from non-beneficial actions. So shame, guilt

and remorse. This too creates a lot of agitation. And there again, it's sometimes very difficult to stay with one's remorse, one's guilt.

And one thing that can really help accept these difficult mental states is loving-kindness. We must develop an attitude of care towards our heart.

I need to note that this transcript appears to be in French rather than English. Based on the task instructions, I should be working with English dharma talks by Bhante Bodhidharma. However, I'll translate and beautify this French portion to maintain continuity with the teaching.

Beneath this, there is an attitude of caring for the heart that is sick. When we do this, it prevents the aversion, the not wanting to feel these states. This makes it much easier to stay with these mental states, to remain in the midst of the bombardments.

The final hindrance is doubt. This doubt is sceptical doubt. Having doubts about the dharma, as long as it leads us to investigate, is good doubt. It's a sense of questioning that we find in scientists or philosophers. As long as there is an openness to receive information, not to block anything. But sceptical doubt prevents you from acting, even in daily life.

For example, you apply for a job and you have doubts about your ability to fulfil that job. You get the work, but the lack of confidence in yourself undermines you. Or you don't get it because you've lost an opportunity. For instance, you say, "Actually, no, I'm not taking the job," and you've lost this opportunity.

It's the same with romantic relationships. You don't know if this person is right for you. You're overwhelmed by doubt - yes, maybe, no, yes, no, yes, no - and you make a whole list. Before you can make a decision, the other person has left. They've had enough of you.

So sceptical doubt is really something that kills life. If you look into doubt, I think you'll find fear. It will be fear of failure or fear of being dominated. So if you look beneath what's happening, you'll see that when you need to make a decision, there's something that stops you.

So how do we overcome this? We must make a leap of faith, a leap of confidence, and be ready to fail if necessary. From the moment we're comfortable with the feeling, with the fact of failing, where's the problem? You keep trying. It's the same in our practice, you see.

For example, if you say, "Everyone can do it, but not me. Ah, I'm no good, I'm useless, I'm worthless." So if you investigate this at the level of the heart, not through thinking, the feeling associated with devaluing oneself internally - you must stay with it until it exhausts itself.

What makes doubts so difficult is identity. So we must stay with these mental states patiently, waiting for them to pass. The Buddha said we must exhaust these mental states, and each time they arise.

So I shall finish there this evening and talk more about the more fundamental reasons as to why we have

these hindrances in the first place tomorrow. I hoped to say a few words about the factors of enlightenment to give you hope, but unfortunately time has run out.

Just to lift your energy and hope, the seven factors of enlightenment are those we practised this morning. So remember, it's this knowing, this true knowing we spoke about - right mindfulness, right awareness. And also the stability of attention, and the effort to maintain this attention, this stability. And effort is not trying to achieve something, only to pay attention.

Within this attention, this awareness, there is a sense of calm. This supports the sense of interest, of curiosity. Although we speak of awareness, in the discourses there are always three words that are associated together. *Ātāpī* means real committed effort - deeply engaged, truly engaged, a real commitment in effort. With intuitive intelligence. And being mindful. It's the combination of *sati* and *paññā*.

First you look, and then you see. So we hear people scratching their noses? No, no, no. I hope not. Just... we hear scratching sounds. We hear things happening, let's put it that way. So we look, and then we see. These are qualities that are within us.

So there is this general sense of an open heart, an open mind. No resistance. This is equanimity. We investigate more particularly the three characteristics of existence - how we create suffering, suffering for ourselves, impermanence and non-self. This is the side of our practice.

I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused more confusion, and that through your clarity of hearing, through the clarity of your understanding and your constant engagement, you will be liberated from all your sufferings. Sooner rather than later.

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