

# 2003-11-10 Satipatthana Sutta (Week 9)

## Dharmas - 5 Hindrances (Part 2)

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### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

hindrances, mind, desire, sensual desire, arising, mindfulness, feel, recognizing, couch, exercises, caught, called, sensual pleasure, happening, sexual desire, manifestations, ill, longer, poisons, object

### SPEAKERS

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So we're continuing today with discussion from last week, which is on the five hindrances. So we're slowly going through this discourse by the Buddha called the discourse on the establishment of mindfulness, the foundations of mindfulness. And it's one of the very important discourses in our tradition. And it gives a whole series of exercises on developing mindfulness. And somebody that these exercises are integral to how we do vipassana here or spirit rock or IMS. And some of the exercises have kind of, you know, marginalized by the tradition and modern tradition is not used that much. But much of vipassana that comes from this text, and there are four foundations of mindfulness, four areas for developing mindfulness, it's talked about so there's the body is one area. The second area is the feeling tone of our experience. The third is state of our minds. And the fourth which is we're on now is called dhamas, or Dharma has the word Dharma is not so easy to translate into English because there's so many different meanings. I like to translate it sometimes as the notables. Because just things the mind can know. And it can mean a lot of things right. So anything that Mike knows at Dhamma dharma. So it kind of almost doesn't mean much. But what happens there's a kind of a shift here in the text when when the exercises that come now under this category, prior to this, in a sense, most of the exercises are a little bit more. Or at least the way we usually interpreted text is a little bit more bear recognition of how things are seeing how things are seeing our body state. If we're bodies, feels pressure, we feel the pressure. If we feel it's unpleasant pressure, we feel it as unpleasant pressure. If we feel annoyed by that pressure, we feel the mental state of annoyance. It's there. And we're just not no judgement and recognizing what's there, which is a simple recognition of here. This is what's here. What happens now in this fourth foundation is that it's more than just simply recognizing what is happening certainly as part of it. And now with the hindrances, recognizing the appearance of a hindrance when it's there, and being non judgmental about it, but there's also a quality of being IE. This is where my, my I don't have the quite the right word. Maybe analytical, or perhaps some people call it some kind of a synthesis is going on. There's kind of a broader understanding of the patterns

and the cause and effect relationship of some of the states. We're aware of that arising within us. And in particular, in this fourth foundation of mindfulness, it's looking at those states that either keep the mind in darkness, or they're those states that help bring them out the mind into the light into the light of awareness into freedom, those those states that keep us in bondage to those states that bring us freedom and awakening. And the five hindrances is the first of the five areas to look at for these purposes, and the five hindrances have to do with that which keeps us in the dark or keeps us hindered or keeps us bound. The counterpoint in some, in some discussions of this is the fourth exercise in this section, which is the exercise on the seven factors of awakening. The five five hindrances are described as that which darkens the mind covers up the mind closes the mind contracts, the mind and the soul factors of waking is that which opens the mind expands the mind brings the mind to light enlightens the mind. And so these two are kind of intense counterpoints to each other. The five hindrances, another simile different than the ones I told last week is that of gold. Gold which has impurities in it is supposed to be I don't know I've never worked with gold but it's supposed to be brittle. It doesn't have much luster or rightness is kind of dull perhaps it breaks easily. But if you kind of work the gold, beat it for a while and kind of, I don't know how you do it melted. I know. They bring out the impurities. Then pure gold is as a bright shine to it. It's bright, it's luminous. It's it's can be worked. It's malleable doesn't break so easily. And so that analogy is the same thing with the mind. The mind that has a hindrances in them, is brittle, it breaks easily. It's, it can't work it very well, it's not very workable. But if you can kind of work the mind, train the mind. So the hindrances no longer dominate the mind, then the mind becomes bright, it becomes soft, and it becomes a workable, malleable, you can you can work with it, you can shape it. And that's very important because the deeper work of mindfulness practice, you want to have a mind which is starting to get soft and malleable and, and workable, you can actually work the mind. So just simply a mind that's been trained, but it's mine that has been trained so that you can do a certain kind of work, it can look more deeply in our experience, it can hold the mind can be hold steady and clear and soft. As we look deeply into what our experiences the hindrances make it very difficult to do that. If you're caught up in anything, the mind is not going to see very clearly. So we have to find some way for the mind not to be caught up in itself, caught up in its concerns caught up in its things. It's angry about caught up in things it wants a lot. And so, the hindrances are a lot to do about where the mind gets caught. So there's five hindrances, five places the mind gets caught. So and there's so the first one is called sensual desire. Sometimes we expand it to meet all desire because desire, it can be kind of like a black hole. And Ill will is a second one. And then it's sloth and torpor for the third, restlessness and anxiety or remorse for the fourth, and doubt for the fifth. And these can be understood as manifest have what's called a three poisons. And Buddhism has a lot of lists, as you know, and if you want to be a Buddhist, you have to deal with that. There's various ways of dealing with you could ignore it. But, so, but there's a lot of lists about things like the defilements, the poisons, the torments, the toxins, the hindrances, strong words. And it's part of the reason why there's these different lists is that if we're kind of looking for the ultimate in mental health, spiritual health, it helps if you understand what the illness are, are. If you if you go to medical school, and all you learn is all the things wonderful qualities of what a healthy person is like. That'd be great, wouldn't it? It's all you studied, you made lots of Milan, it's great and the nice, but then a sick person came to see you didn't have a clue. what's what's

that about? You know, it's not a very good medical training, I think. So you want to get the you know, and medical schools get a lot of lists, a lot of lists, right? More than more than the Buddhists that you see, we're kind of light and lists. And so, anyway, we have these lists of things. So you need to really get to know these. And it's not meant that Buddhists or dour or kind of, you know, party poopers because we've talked about these things, any more than doctors or party poopers. Right. It's just that the expected effect of you know, that if you want to be you know, find your way to health. So have you strong words and the corruptions and things like that. So this is this is one of them the hindrances so that there's a, the three poisons are kind of at the root of it all they're called also called the roots, the roots for unskillful unhelpful, unhealthy behavior. And those three roots are greed, hate and delusion. And it said that that's, you know, in America or somewhere like that we say in English, Love makes the world go round. The Buddhists don't say that the three poisons make the world go around. But they say that it makes the cycles of our suffering spin around as the fuel for the cycles of how we suffer is greed, hate and delusion. And the five hindrances are manifestations of these three hindrances of these three poisons. So, desire, essential desire, the first hindrance is a manifestation of greed. Ill will is a manifestation of hate and the last Three hindrances are said to be manifestations of delusion. Isn't that interesting that sloth and torpor and restlessness and remorse and doubt are all manifestations of delusion? So what is it about sloth and torpor, sloth and torpor is not just ordinary tiredness, it has to do with some way in which we're relating to our experience. Some people say it as see the strategy of dealing with things that are difficult to deal with. We get tired or shut down, we get tired, we get resistant, we get lethargic, you know? And, or we get restless and anxious or something. We don't understand what's going on and so not understanding you can lead to these manifestations. So let me read you again, this section on the five hindrances. And how monks, does a monk abide contemplating damas as damas here Among goodbyes contemplating damas dhammas as dhammas in terms of the five hindrances, and how they do this if they're essential desire in him, a Bhiku understands their essential desire in me or there being no central desire in her, she understands there is no central desire in me. And he also understands how there comes to be the arising of unreason central desire, and how there comes to be the abandoning of arisen sensual desire, and how that comes to be the future non arising of abandoned sensual desire. And then it goes through the same thing repeated same things with ill will sloth torpor, restlessness and remorse and doubt. So, the first of it is simply if there is sensual desire. The person knows their essential desire here. It's part of his non judgmental clear, simple recognition. This is what's happening now. Oh, there's desire, you see an attractive person. And there's lust. So you know, you know, there's that sensual desire, it's a form of sensual desire, or you see a really beautiful sweater on someone, and you want that sweater, that sensual desire, or you start fantasizing about having a great vacation, and a horrible grade is going to be that sensual. That's manifestation of sensual desire. Or you're sitting here meditating, and you really would like to have a pleasant breath, you really would like to have a really nice pleasant breath. That's sensual desire, wanting that wanting that kind of nice, pleasant kind of breathing, wanting comfort, and so the mind can get pulled into that world. And so it's very important when that arises to recognize this is what's happening now. It's very important here to see that the text does not say when their central desire recognized sensual desire, get yourself really stoked up and start being really critical and judgmental, and take it as a personal fault. Go find your confessor and confess or run and

hide. It doesn't say you know that you're supposed to do anything about it. It just says, recognize that it's there. There's a lot of freedom then come to the very simple recognition of what's there. Now, that's very basic to mindfulness practice. In addition, the text tells us that if there is no sensual desire, one is supposed to understand. There is no sensual desire present. And this sometimes is missed in mindfulness practice, because we tend to focus a lot on negative paying attention to what is happening. But the absence of something is not something right. You don't pay you know how to paint you know, where is it but this text talks about notice when Something is not there. And this is particularly useful. If you've had a long bout of dealing with something like, you know, I've been you know, longer than I care to tell you you know involved in some of these hindrances caught up in thoughts and ideas and feelings about them. So, you know, sometimes I, you know, I want them you know, just kind of pleasant to have them come come over and over again, I take over my mind, enough for that, please, you know, that, you know, please, because day after day, especially on retreat, it can happen, we don't have anything better to do. Seemingly. And, but then suddenly, you know, you find that it's gone. Either you've learned to work with it so that no longer rises. Or it just, you know, it's past this time, and so you recognize what it feels like. To be free of this particular hindrance, so you feel the mind is more open, more relaxed, you feel the mind is not feels like Velcro or you don't feel the compulsion or the pressure to think this way. You don't feel the tightness of the contraction. You don't feel the way in which the mind is kind of getting derailed or pulled away or hijacked, kidnapped by these things. And it's great, it feels great. Compare picking up one of the similes from last week. The Buddha said that when the mind is free of sensual desire being caught by sensual desire, it's supposed to bring a kind of joy and it's the kind of joy and happiness that a person might feel if the person is finally free of debt, and has a little extra money leftover. Now some of you know that's really good feeling right? You're waiting for that day. So that kind of kind of likeness that comes so directly what that's like, and the absence and part of the reason for this is that getting a sense of physical mental experience, your sense of the absence helps us to appreciate that the status like that freedom is like, and the appreciation of something strengthens it. And it helps us to highlight when the hindrance arises, you can see something more clearly, if you have something to contrast it with. And if you really know the quality of a mind, which is free of a hindrance, the lightness, the clarity, the ease or that kind of mind, then it's a lot easier to notice when you're caught and contracted by hindrance. People are always caught in the hindrance, probably don't even know there's a different way of living. They're always angry, always seeing the world a certain way. And other people know that that way, but they don't know it because it's kind of you know, it's kind of like invisible to them or to us. With that way, so that's part of I think, the function of seeing the absence of Central desire. Then it goes on to say, the person also understands how that comes to be the arising of unreason central desire. That means that you're going along minding your own business, there's no central desire going on at all. And then, lo and behold, you find yourself in the grips of sexual desire, desire for comfort or pleasure, whatever different forms of sensual desire. And the person the mindfulness then also involves not just simply recognizing what's happening, but being, but also a little bit. I don't know if analytical is the right word, because it may be the wrong connotations. But little bit, we begin comprehending understanding the causes and conditions that stimulated the arising of that central desire that wasn't there before. So there's more than just me Recognizing its presence, progressive organizing how it came to be. So

you're walking down the road, and you will go by a storefront. And you see in the storefront, you know, this beautiful couch. And it just beautiful, beautiful cat looks really comfortable to sit in, and your couch at home is tattered. And it's kind of like a springs are popping up. So it's kind of uncomfortable sitting. So Wow, it'd be really great to have that couch. I can be really relaxed. In the day I can come and just kind of sit back and be a couch potato. And it really will enhance my television viewing. And, and so this would be great. And, and so the mind starts getting pulled into this world of what's called a Buddhist book called sensual desire, wanting this fantasy of how great it is to have it. So you see it arising. And then you see the causes and conditions of it arising as Oh, I was walking by the store and they had this couch there. It was very pleasant to look This couch in my mind started making a fantasy but would be like to sit in this couch. And my mind got caught up in the fantasy of what it's like to be in the couch. And my mind was hijacked, I got pulled off into all kinds of directions. Or perhaps you see, oh, prior to showing up to that store, I was actually had a predisposition to think about couches. Because my boyfriend or girlfriend is coming to visit, I haven't seen him or her for weeks. And he or she will think much better of me if I have a good couch. And it's really important, we didn't impress this person. And so we're kind of like, we're kind of like, triggered we're kind of like here trigger kind of minds kind of like, primed to look for ways to enhance our sense of self so that we get more approval by this wonderful person or allies. And so it just happens. We have It's kind of the kind of prime that way. So we've gone along past the storefront. And part of the reason we latch on to the couch, is because we have this charge in our mind about finding ways to make ourselves look better to our friend actually ended up on the spot the story, right? So maybe it's a bad story, but you're supposed to fill in the stories, you know, from your own life. I just tried to come up with some examples. And so you start understanding some of these causes and conditions, the state of the mind, the state of your concerns, your values, your attachment things you're attached to, that go into feeding and fueling the hijacking of the mind by the hindrance by sensual desire. So this is where so some of this can be involved analysis and then thinking about reflecting on what happened here. More than just recognizing what is happening. How did this come to happen using your intelligence using ability to think about it a reflection of memory, spending time with it, exploring it. Then he also understands how there comes to be the arising of unreasoned sensual desire, and how there comes to be the abandoning of arisen sensual desire. So, the essential desire is gone. And then you understand not only that it's been, that's absent, but you also understand how it is apt and how it was abandoned, how you were able to let go of it, how you're able to become free of it. And this is part of the point of practice is not it's become have the mind become free, not caught by things. So here you know how that happened. Now, some of you hopefully this is a good Comparison or analogy. I've had the experience sometimes of running, jogging, you know, going for, you know, for exercise, and I decided I'm going to start the jogging regime, you know, go running for a little bit every day or something. And I haven't not been very good shape maybe. And so I started running. And at first first days or the first 10 minutes or five minutes or something, it sometimes it can feel like the body is not cooperating, you know, the mind will is willing, but the body is not. And, you know, so I'm there and it kind of feels like the body's kind of heavy, like it's manual labor to pull it along. And it feels kind of kind of like a little bit like a burning through mud little bit or especially if I'm a little tired. And you know, it's kind of like the body's a drag rather than helping me along and have to kind of put effort extra effort to kind of carry

me along. And then at some point I don't know what happens inside, physiologically or mentally. But at some point, the body comes along and the body is no longer resistant or drag or heavy nor sticky. But it's become, it's kind of participating is lightened up it's agreeing to go along, there's no resistance, and for a little while for another two minutes, then whatever however long it feels like you know, it's there with it feels like vitality, joy, it's kind of like feel lighter, I'm kind of springing off the ground. And it feels like you know, I've been freed from not exactly gravity to feed from this resistance, this heaviness, stickiness of the body that's somewhat familiar. So, the same thing with the mind. The mind can be sticky can be weighed down, it can be dragging the Velcro mind. And so you want to apply the mind you want to exercise the mind. But the mind is kind of muddy, it doesn't want to work. It doesn't want to apply or apply itself. And I think sometimes when we press it down to the mindfulness practice, you can feel that way. And sometimes it feels like manual labor to pay attention to What's going on to pay attention to the breath to pay attention to what's ever happening in the moment? And so, you know, we have to keep making the effort and the mind slips off and gets lost again, we can make the effort again. And it's like the mind is not there. And then at some point, the mind shifts. It, lets go it relaxes, it becomes workable, it participates, it lifts up, and it goes along and it becomes easy. There's no more Velcro, no more mud. There's no more heaviness, to the mind. To become free of the hindrances is to have that experience of all I'm no longer being weighed down, and the mind becomes a workable, it can be engaged. So how does that happen? That we abandon the hindrance, how does it happen that we become freer from them. Partly if you're lucky. If the mind the mindfulness is strong enough, or if the hindrance is mild enough, sometimes simply recognizing that it's happening. Enough very clear recognition, oh, I'm caught. My central desire is to become uncaught just simply that recognition. Sometimes we need more than just recognition, sometimes recognizing it, and then being very convinced very clearly aware, it this is not an interesting thing for my mind to be doing. To recognize the that this is not a worthwhile activity, there's much better things for you to be doing that fantasizing about going to Hawaii, or having this most wonderful sexual partner or about this wonderful meal you want to have, or couches whatever it might be your favorite sexual desire that you get caught up in. And that this is not you realize is much better things for the mind to do. And this takes a kind of re education of the mind. Because some minds sometimes are You know, have been given a free rein for years and decades, to kind of follow whatever its whims are. And you have a central desire, you go along with it, you have a good sense of ill will and hatred of someone, you go along with it. And no one ever told you that you could do something else. And it's your mind, after all, and whatever your mind says is believable. And, you know, just the authority of the mind, the tyranny of the mind. But to be educated mind realize, Oh, this is not such a useful place to go. There's much better things to do than be caused by this. Just to have a deep recognition sometimes can release the grip we have on this activity. Sometimes that's not enough. What else can we do? further mindfulness into the experience can be very helpful. How do we do very interesting way of doing more mindfulness of a hindrance like sensual desire is to decouple The desire or the ill will the second hindrance to decouple it from the object of desire. I think almost all the time if you have a desire, if a desire for something for a thing. And so part of the reason why we get lost in essential desires, we're lost in our thoughts ideas about that object. What we do with mindfulness practice is you turn the attention 180 degrees around, away from the object to feel what it's like to be desiring. So your mind is no longer concerned about the

object of desire, but is concerned with feeling and sensing what it's like to be in the desiring mode. So you've let go of the object. You no longer you're willing to willingly let go of what you're What do you think the thing is you're focusing on to feel the impulse in your body, the leaning forward, the contraction, the the, how you're energized by it. You know, all the different kind of manifestations that the desire might have. So you turn around and you feel it very carefully. Because you're not no longer primarily relating to the object, then sometimes it just, you know, it wanes it weakens that desire. But also as you feel the desiring, you discover all kinds of interesting things about yourself. You get to understand something about the origins of that desire. What is it coming from? Where's the Genesis where to which giving birth to it? Sometimes, I like very much the idea that in English we have the word wanting, which is kind of similar to desire. But one thing also has the implication of like a soup, which is wanting salt. It's lacking. So the idea of wanting is something implies sometimes that something is wanting, it's missing something. And, and sometimes central desire is a attempt to try to fill a hole that we have some sense of lack or avoid, if you're lonely, or if you're sad, or if you're, you're depressed or discouraged or, you know, alienated or something. Sometimes we'd kind of reach out for some sensual pleasure, essential gratification in order to somehow fill that hole with pleasure. I think many times that's the case with people who are addicted to things. They're looking for sensual pleasure as a way to feel certain kinds of holes. So by turning around and feeling the desiring, you might also feel a bit more the origin of it. And it's much more useful to sit at the origin than it is to sit at the desire itself to sit with the loneliness. Otherwise, if you don't stick with the loneliness, the loneliness was manifest in some other way, even if you can settle the desire. So sometimes turning back you can see deeper what's going on. Now, if the desire can't be, like, oh so easily, so sometimes you just let go of it. You see, it is not useful. You decide, Oh, I think I stopped doing that activity. I don't need to do that anymore. Or you let it be some people say it's more profound to let be than to let go. But neither case letting be means you don't pick it up. Just don't get involved in it and it kind of fades away with time. But sometimes it's not so easy to let go of sexual desire. And as I said in my story earlier, I spent I spent days caught up in certain central desires on retreat, where there's no distractions to interrupt me from it, except for the meals and I've been caught by it a long time. And so the Buddha is and then sometimes offers what's called antidotes. So, to bring up things, which kind of, well antidotes which kind of negate or balanced out or neutralize the thing. Some of them are unpleasant to do. Like for example, with sensual desire, you try to think about the unpleasant aspect of the object of desire. So, like it's, like if you're caught in desire for a person sent you a lust for a person and you just can't let go of it. Think about their intestines. Or, you know, their you know, Oh, okay. Yeah, that's for example. their sense of humor that does it. Oh, really, you know? So thinking about the unpleasant aspect of the person. And at this place a little retreat, I was helping teach last week, jack kornfield was doing a presentation, I'd be dharma. And at some point, he had everybody in the room, bare their teeth. And then everybody look around, look at everybody else, look at his teeth. And you look at people differently that way. You look at bones. So you kind of kind of reformulate what you're looking at. And sometimes that's very helpful if you don't want to be kind of caught by this sensual desire. It's painful sometimes because endlessly with some kind of desire. You kind of imagined that we look at look at the unpleasant aspect of that experience. It said another antidote is concentration practice. So you just kind of find your breath or find some object of concentration, and

just get really concentrated so that the food of the mind isn't going any more to the desire, but it's just going to be getting concentrated, and then with time, the desire will fade away. So there's many ways of working with these hindrances when they arise. And a lot of what I think a good mindfulness student is supposed to do is to become wise about the hindrances and develop a wide repertoire of ways of working with them. So in some way or other to learn to overcome their hindering quality. And one of the very important points that may be made here, which I made last week, is, we don't want to be at war with the so called hindrances. We don't want to be. And some of some American teachers prefer not to use the word hindrances. Because it has this connotation that it's judgmental. These are bad, you shouldn't have these things. sensual desire is not considered bad, or wrong or evil or whatever it might be. But it's the hindering quality of sensual desire, we want to overcome unnecessarily sensual desire. If your sensual desire doesn't hinder or close down or obscure, your mindfulness doesn't hijack you, then there's no problem with having sexual desire, but it's the hindering quality we're trying to overcome. So we're not at war with a particular hindrances. We're rather trying to overcome this force. being caught by them. Then the last of the exercises here is the person becomes aware how their comes to be the future non arising of abandoned sensual desire, how their comes to be the future non arising of abandoned sexual desire, you've let go of sexual desire. And you know how it is that this is not going to rise again. Isn't that great? How do you know that? One of the ways you know it doesn't arise will rise again is if you're very confident in your powers of mindfulness and your skills of working with this essential desire might arise, but you're not gonna get caught by it. But I think more profoundly what it's saying here. And this is pointing to the to the really transformative aspect aspect of Buddhist practice is that as we get More spiritually mature as we get into the stages of enlightenment stages liberation, there is an inner transformation of the psyche, where forces that are present before are eradicated or empty or finished and they no longer arise. And as at certain point of practice, the tendency, the impulse for sensual desire and ill will, is abated, is weakened. They still might arise but it's not much power behind them. It's an it's a further stage of enlightenment. There's the eradication elimination the ending of sensual desire and available and the claim in Buddhist tradition is that with enough enlightenment, you will have no more sensual desire. No more ill will. Most people don't mind the ill will part losing that most people are somewhat unsure about they really want to lose essential desire, desire for sensual pleasure. What's that about? But that's what they say. So when you get up to that point, where you can see that this is possible for you to once and for all abandoned, let go of sensual desire and ill will so will never appear again. You'll have to kind of really do some deep soul searching and say, do I really want to do this? I don't know. But well short of that. The mindfulness practice will offer you a lot of benefits will help a lot and up you experience a lot of freedom in your life. And once you start learning at the working where they work, With the five hindrances and so they're no longer grab the mind hijacking the mind, then the mind can be applied in the mind that gets is really applied in a consistent way is a mind that starts developing the seven factors of awakening. So, we're still a few weeks away before we talk about seven factors of awakening. We have two more paragraphs. We're finished with the hindrances now now that we've taken care of those that hopefully never rise again. And no, I felt was finished. I was ready to move on, you know, not not now but next week. I mean, at the end, I could talk more about them but what would you like would you like to To kind of spend more time on it another week and Henry's really kind of,

you know, or you know, kind of go through them carefully each one and spend more time like on the others, or are you ready to go on to your sense of self? attachment to self? I'd like to go on, I think, and there's a lot of almost every of the past in the book has whole sections on the hindrances and how to work with each one. So I mean, I appreciate your question is very important. And maybe when I finish this series, we can spend, maybe be interesting spent one day on each one, since they're so key to the practice. So next week, the sense of self, and how that sense how the sense of self or attachment to self a sense of self is one of the one of the forces that obscures the mind, keeps it in bondage keeps it in suffering. So stay tuned. Thank you